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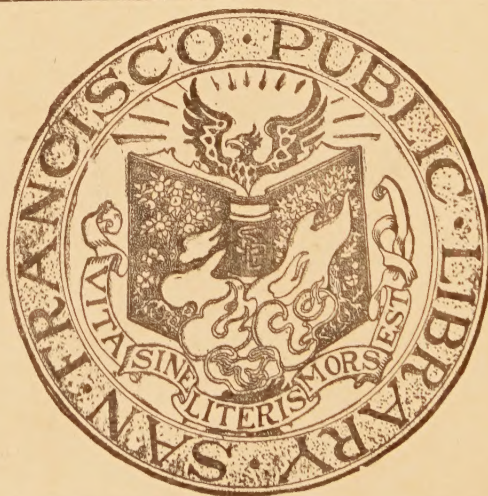
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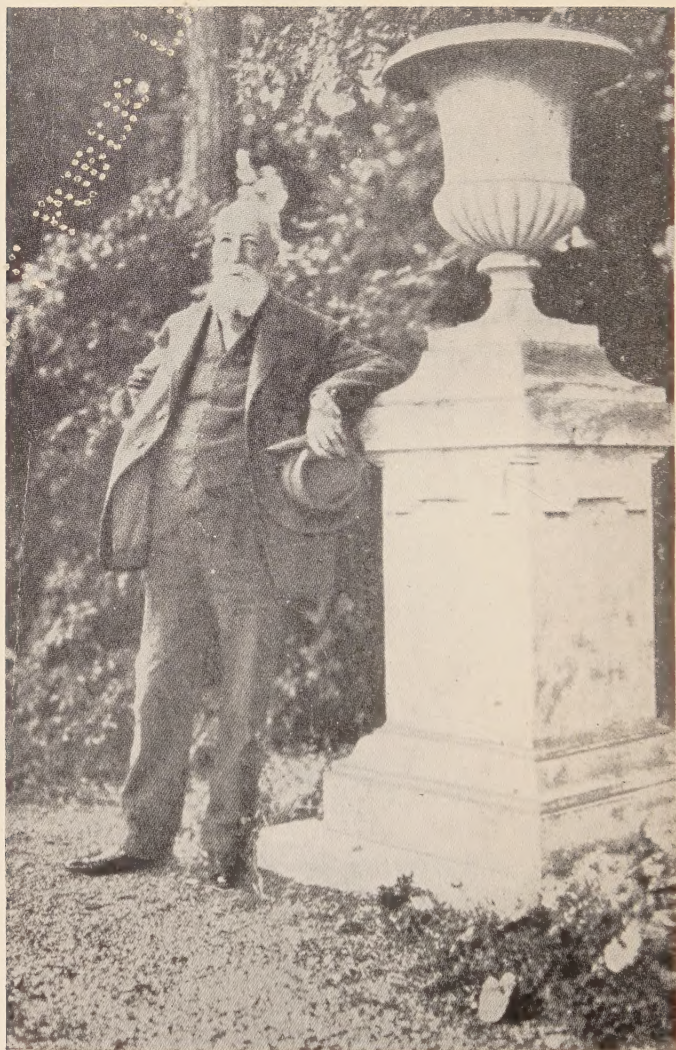








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Anatole France



# ANATOLE FRANCE AT HOME

*By*  
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*Translated by*  
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*With unpublished photographs and documents*

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## ANATOLE FRANCE AT HOME

### FOREWORD

**T**HE only merit to be claimed for the stories and talks in this book is their sincerity. M. France arrived at La Bechellerie in September, 1914. I became acquainted with him almost immediately, and fell into the habit of visiting him every Sunday in the beginning, later every Friday. Barring the various separations and absences necessitated by the war, I was able to keep up my visits to the Master for nearly ten years in a more or less regular manner.

The Master was fond of talking and I was only too happy to be privileged to listen to him. He discussed everything, whether it concerned the present or the past. He never permitted a conversation to dwell very long on banal or trivial details. He somehow knew how to derive the most startling observations, the loftiest views from the most ordinary small talk. His marvelous memory and his prodigious knowledge gave an inestimable value to whatever he said.

I am setting down here a few of his remarks. I had been impelled to make note of some of them, and enjoyed being able to recover them. I am certainly aware of all the respects in which this volume falls short of its purpose, especially in the spontaneity of these day-to-day conversations on all subjects, varying according to his mood, the number of his visitors and their personalities. To convey all that was a difficult matter; the entire effect, had I attempted it, would have been scarcely coherent.

Much to my regret, therefore, I was obliged to group and classify my recollections and my notes. I have endeavored,



as far as possible, to save the Master's thoughts in the very form in which it was my privilege to take them down. Repetitions were inevitable and must be forgiven. My aim is fulfilled if I have succeeded in giving some notion of these Sundays at La Bechellerie during and after the war and in preserving a few impressions and thoughts of the great Master we have just lost.

It may be that M. France has his weaknesses; it would be cruel to emphasize these and hold them up for derision. Rather let us see in him a noble and lasting testimony of the beauty of our language and the genius of our people.

ANATOLE FRANCE  
AT HOME



## CHAPTER I

### THE FIRST CONVERSATIONS

**A**NATOLE FRANCE has come to Tours from Versailles, I was told one day at the time I was attached to the Court-martial of the 9th *Region* as clerk. I learned that he had purchased at St. Cyr an estate called La Bechellerie and that he intended making it his home throughout the war. The possibility of seeing the man whose fascinating work had given me so much delight and whom I had seen but once before in M. Champion Senior's bookshop on the *quai Malaquais*, was worth risking a most timid visit to the new and unexpected resident of Touraine.

I confided my intention to a lady of my acquaintance who had been inspired by the same desire and had been successful—women are so skilful—in satisfying it. She told me that several days before she had set about—we can understand with what emotions—to entreat the honor of a reception. She had been very well received. The Master had been hearty and amiable in his welcome, full of kindness and an exquisite good-humor. He had not been at all difficult to approach. She offered to present me and I accepted. I obtained the necessary permission and we started on our expedition.

It was an afternoon in December. The ground was covered with autumn leaves, the air humid, the sky rainy. From the hills we could see the city which, with its towers, its steeples, the clock of the St. Martin Basilica, seemed bathed in fog. Soon, at the turning of a road and at the end of a little walk bordered with trees, we saw the gate of La Bechellerie; and with not a little emotion we rang the bell.



M. France was alone and would be glad to see us, we were told by an old woman who seemed to have just stepped out of the pages of the *Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*. I entered a vestibule cluttered with boxes and then passed into an absolutely empty room. M. France was sitting by the fireplace. My friend presented me. The Master gave me the most pleasant welcome imaginable, while I expressed my joy in meeting him. We began to talk immediately.

I sat in a wicker chair, the Master in an old leather arm-chair whose springs creaked with every movement he made. The single piece of furniture in the room was a little black wooden desk that seemed to come from a primary school. The walls were unadorned and whitewashed. Time passed quickly, and from that day on I was under the spell of the incomparable conversation of the man I shall admire to the end of my days.

From the beginning it was inevitable that we should speak of the war. M. France spoke with reserve and melancholy; he said the customary things about the heroism of our armies, the glory and valor of the leaders, the hope of a rapid victory to put an end to the evils of war. These words came easily. Yet all the while I felt very definitely that they expressed only a superficial sentiment. He seemed more sincere when he spoke of Jaurès, of his efforts to keep peace, of his death, which he deplored in eloquent language. "If Jaurès had had the power, if Jaurès had lived, if Jaurès were there," he said over and over again.

The conversation turned to Jules Lemaître, who had died a few months before, and of whom he spoke for a long time. He had been his friend. In spite of their disagreement over the affair, there had been no rupture.

M. France.—Lemaître was a charming person, but he wore himself out in all sorts of ways. Do you know that he always worked with a bottle of rum beside him on the table,

drinking numerous little glasses of it as the hours went by; at the end of his work the bottle was empty. You see, that killed him in the end, especially if you add to this the immoderate devotion of a woman of letters. . . . But what an exquisite writer he was, what a subtle mind he had, capable of such delicate shades and distinctions. See how carefully I have preserved this sentence out of the last letter he ever wrote me.

And he showed me on the wall, written in his own hand over the fireplace, the following sentence:

“Don’t suppose that since the seventeenth century anybody has ever written real French.”

Skipping from one subject to another, we somehow came to Saint Paul. And here M. France was inexhaustible. His knowledge of religious questions was astonishing. Saint Paul fascinated him. He saw in him the founder, nearly the inventor of Christianity.

M. France.—Isn’t it strange that the man who did most to spread Christianity should be just the one who never knew Christ? It’s extraordinary, for, after all, he only saw him in a vision, and that can’t be called seeing. Paul stirred the whole Gentile world in the name of a God he had never beheld.

We both discussed the strange and obscure history of the origins of Christianity. Paul and the Gentiles, Paul and Circumcision, Paul and his churches and communities, whose zeal he kept alive with his fiery epistles, which still make, after all these centuries, such a vivid and profound impression.

M. France.—Isn’t he the real founder, the real creator, since it was he who formulated so clearly the dogma of Redemption, he whom the church owes most for having brought to the Gentiles the idea of a redeeming God come for the salvation of all, while the believers of the earliest period and John, the Lord’s

brother, tried to keep budding Christianity in the bosom of Israel and within the confines of the law?

I reminded M. France of Paul's incredible difficulties with the Judean-Christian Church of Jerusalem, which even contested his title of apostle because he had not seen Christ; of Paul's efforts to conciliate it, of how he succeeded, by bringing it periodically the result of the collections he took up in the churches and communities of Asia.

M. France.—That's true enough, and it's all very strange. You see, my friend, collections already! No doubt about it, the Church was already founded.

I was presented to Mlle. Laprevotte, at that time the devoted friend of the Master, who later became Madame France. She spoke of her domestic difficulties: she feared the cold both for herself and for M. France, and was busy thinking up ways to keep them warm.

M. France asked me about my civil and military situation. I told him of my present position with the Court-martial.

"I'm afraid," he replied, "you must see many injustices done."

Such was my first interview with M. France. I soon took to visiting La Bechellerie every Sunday. I heard there a day-to-day commentary upon the war, and I hope I shall be able to give some account of this. The best way seems to be to recall some of these conversations without trying to systematize them or draw conclusions from them. It is, indeed, their irregular and desultory character that helps to give an impression of reality and life.

It was to be my good fortune to visit La Bechellerie many times after this gloomy December day in 1914, to meet many people there and hear a variety of things discussed. But I shall never forget these early interviews with M. France seated in the dilapidated arm-chair, with its squeaking springs, leaning on his little desk to write flattering dedications, most flat-



tering when he was most indifferent to the people to whom he addressed them. I'm sure this little game of his entertained him and gave him a special delight. He began by writing the most elaborate sentences in the volumes that were handed to him for dedication: To Madame X. whose . . . etc. Then came an exquisite compliment and the Lady was transported with joy. It gave the Master a malicious pleasure to ask her, at just this moment, who she was.

Later in these Sunday afternoons that I spent so frequently with him, I saw him again and again enthusing to perfect strangers who came to see him.

"My good friend, how nice, how very nice of you, indeed, to come all this way. I'm so glad to see you!" And in presenting the stranger to Mlle. Laprevotte, he would say:

"By the way, Mademoiselle, Monsieur . . ."

The name failing him, the stranger had to supply it. M. France would then say: "Ah! yes, M. X." and would straightway turn his back on him. A few minutes later he would approach one of his intimates and ask him if he knew this person; the answer was nearly always in the negative. M. France, completely satisfied, would then laugh his full, rub his hands together and say: "Neither do I."

It is from these first visits that I brought away a twofold impression, never contradicted by deeper acquaintance: first, that M. France was kindly, kindly in a superficial and yet genuine way that never touched the actual indifference and egotism in which he was immersed (I shall give many instances of this and I could give many more); second, that M. France was a great ironist. I am not sure that anything in the world gave him quite so much amusement as to make fun of everything, of his friends, his intimates, even of the members of his family, yet without hurting anyone's feelings.

Like M. Bergeret, he knew how to be indulgent.

## CHAPTER II

### ANATOLE FRANCE AND THE WAR

**D**URING the first months of the war, Anatole France tried to adopt the sentiments of the whole country, but from time to time he could not resist the temptation of poking fun at our commanders.

"General Joffre," he said one day, "learned of the victory of the Marne through the *Petit Parisien*."

It was plain that he was making serious efforts to remain in harmony with popular feeling. What was responsible for this? Was it the real desire to keep at peace with public opinion, or was it in the interests of prudence? I am rather inclined to support the second reason. The fate of Jaures disturbed him a great deal; he spoke of it frequently, and I often felt that he stood in fear of a similar fate, with which he was, moreover, threatened in daily anonymous letters. Besides, his rooms were full of spies at the beginning of the war. A considerable number of unknown visitors were always about who would come and then never show up again. There were also many officers and generals just back from the front or about to leave. M. France was obviously being carefully listened to and attentively watched. For these reasons he preserved the greatest good-humor and the most extreme reserve toward all.

"When we have carried off the victory," "no peace impossible while the enemy is on the territory of the Republic," were expressions that fell from his lips again and again.

But there were many reservations in what he had to say. Fundamentally he had no love for the army. He pointed out

its incoherences, its mania for keeping records in an intensive red-tape, the unspeakable defects of its sanitary system. He was never happier than when he could tell some fine story magnificently illustrating the imbecility of the military class. Some of his views on the war were extremely wise.

For example, he observed one day that it was relatively rather easy for men to make the transition from the state of peace to the state of war, but that it would be much more difficult to make the transition from the state of war to the state of peace:

M. France.—For in general, in spite of its horrors, war is not unpopular. It favors and develops certain instincts in man which are only dormant. Brutality, the taste of blood, the joy and even the intoxication of killing are feelings too profoundly planted in the human heart not to be easily aroused. With the press to let loose violence, preach hate, fan vengeance, stir up enthusiasm, the fighters will be kept going. But it will be quite another story when the time comes to lay down arms and to return to the relative order necessitated by peace.

He liked to show how popular the war was, how much man loved it:

M. France.—It will satisfy the highest desires of Frenchmen. They will all be functionaries, all supported by the State, and all decorated. At bottom, what more do they want?

The conduct of women during the war inspired a few reflections:

M. France.—What this war will demonstrate more than any other single fact, is that it is impossible for a woman to sleep alone. If she cannot sleep with her husband, because he is away at war, she'll sleep with someone else. It's of no importance, so long as she doesn't lie in a cheerless and solitary bed.



Out of all this talk came no end of observations, for the characteristic feature of M. France's conversation was to develop the least important as well as the most important subjects in startling and unexpected ways. He would illustrate his comments with examples chosen from history; and his conversations, so entertaining and so profound, won even those who in their heart of hearts did not agree with him. Time passed quickly when one was with him, so absorbing was his charm. When, on winter evenings, we saw the light fade behind the trees facing the salon, we were always sorry to have to bid good-bye to the Master and Mlle. Laprevotte.

---

Meanwhile La Bechellerie had been furnished. Cars and moving-van had been engaged to transport M. France's art treasures. All of these came from Versailles, where the Master had lived before the war; the old Villa Said had been torn down. La Bechellerie now took on a different look. The arm-chair with its worn-out springs and the little black desk made way for splendid pieces. The walls were hung with pictures, and M. France walked about the house for days with nails and a hammer stuffed in the pocket of his jacket or of his dressing-gown. He admitted to me one day that nothing gave him more pleasure than to put things up and take them down, to drive nails and pull them out. The Master brought to these tasks a remarkable energy, for there was perhaps never a man so fond of furnishing a house, getting settled in it, doing all the odd jobs of planning and arrangement.

"I should have been a decorator," he would sometimes say to me.

He knew better than other people just what to admire in a piece of furniture and how to make others admire it; he had a way all his own of passing his beautiful hands—he knew they were beautiful—over the marble top of a chest of drawers,

over the wood of a console, or over the back of a book. In a word, he could tell you its special beauty, and his slightest explanation provoked a further development that brought to one the whole atmosphere of an epoch, its temper, and its style. The salon was well furnished and hung with pictures. There were cream-colored curtains at the windows. Through the panes one could see the garden and the valley of the Choisille, in the distance the slopes of the Cher. From the walls the Virgins of the Italian masters of the Renaissance smiled down somewhat frigid, close by portraits of women by the masters of the eighteenth century. No matter what the season, there were always flowers set on a round table; and in the white marble fireplace M. France burned the trunks of trees cut down upon his own estate.

In these days M. France's customary place was before a little table in a *chapeau de gendarme* chair. In winter he was wrapped in a blanket. His table was always littered with letters and books, for he was always reading, and I have it on good authority, from Mlle. Laprevotte, that his reading was almost uninterrupted. He enjoyed it just as much as ever. His intellectual curiosity was tireless.

One day some books arrived which were put in a little summer-house situated in the garden. The room was of a good size and books covered the walls from the floor to the ceiling. In the middle there was a large table of massive wood. M. France occasionally received his guests there, sitting by the table in a large wing chair.

But this arrangement of La Bechellerie in 1914-1915, of which I am speaking, was changed in the years that followed. Most of the furniture and pictures were taken back to the remodeled Villa Said. Considerable enlargements were made at La Bechellerie in 1921-22, at the time of the arrival of M. Lucien Psichari, M. France's grandson. The Master bought from the antique dealers of Tours chests, secretaries,

sofas and chairs which were distributed among the different rooms, whether at La Bechellerie itself or in what M. France called Les Lapins, a little annex where he housed his guests.

La Bechellerie from 1914 to 1918 was very different from what it is now; it had the air of an old country-seat. It has since been beautified, put in order and enlarged; part of it was demolished. Originally I believe M. France intended to stay there only for the duration of the war, then he began to grow fond of it and finally lived there altogether. It was there that he died.

---

One of the first persons I met at M. France's was a large and genial dealer in pearls in Paris, George S. and his wife. It was in their company that M. France had traveled in Germany and Russia before the war.

Every time S. arrived from Paris to see M. France, the latter would besiege him for the latest news. Now the good S. had a passion for predicting the end of the war. According to him, everything pointed to it; the incapacity of the army chiefs, the poor spirit at the front, the agitation of syndicalist circles—all these appeared indubitable symptoms of its close because they showed the impossibility of continuing it.

M. S. constantly and persistently submitted himself to these delusions.

This stout gentleman was accompanied by his wife, a young, fashionable and pretty woman, who, contrary to her husband's attitude, professed for military men, aviators especially, a violent admiration that M. France approved of but did not share in.

"Certainly, certainly, they're charming, your aviators, they're heroes, and they're so well-dressed, besides!"

M. France listened to S. with attention, to his wife with pleasure. He kept saying to S.: "Go on, my friend, that's

quite interesting, oh!, really! Ah! Moutet believes that . . .” while to Madame S.: “How pretty you are.”

He would take her off to a corner of the salon, offer her cake and candy and show her pictures. He would make her sit down, bend over her, his white beard caressing her lovely neck and shoulders.

We saw this amiable couple quite frequently in 1914 and the following years. M. S. was a really engaging person; he had traveled much and knew a great many languages, which made M. France say that he was the only man who could talk nonsense in thirty-six languages. But this was an exaggeration. M. S., whom I came to know better, was not without intelligence. He told me very curious things about his trip to Russia with M. France. It was he who revealed to me the full extent of Tolstoi's horror of the Master, all the evil he said of him because of his scepticism and lack of faith.

One other person, who disappeared from La Bechellerie after a short time, but who was to be frequently seen there in the beginning, was C., who acted as M. France's secretary. In the last months of 1914 M. France was never seen without him. They would go together to the bookseller Tridon to buy a large supply of detective stories, a type of literature favored by Mlle. Laprevotte. In Mlle. Laprevotte's salon it was C. who did the honors beside M. France, who called him his son. M. France had several such sons, but he often abandoned his children.

C. had a harmless passion for composing plays in which all genres were mixed, with a somewhat disagreeable effect. It being war-time, he overworked the patriotic theme. When he could manage it, he would make us listen to his readings in the evening. The Master was somewhat bored by the whole business.

“Poor C.,” he confided to me one day, “is really most dull. Last night he was intent on reading me his military play, and



in spite of my really superhuman courage, I couldn't make a thing out of it. The worst of it is that he persists in asking me to give him letters of recommendation to directors. I can't, of course I can't, if I did they'd think I was crazy."

C. was mobilized and disappeared. We only saw him at long intervals, then not at all.

A more curious, a more interesting personage was the Englishman Robert D., a writer on the Manchester Guardian. He was amusing and M. France enjoyed his company.

Tall, thin, distinguished, with a pronounced English accent, he told us extraordinary stories with an imperturbable coldness. He constantly frequented the lobby of the *Palais-Bourbon*, when the government and the Chambers returned to Paris from Bordeaux. He had a peculiar way of pronouncing *mon ami* "Ponnsot" (my friend Ponnsot) which was screamingly funny. It was always his friend Ponnsot who figured in his stories. From him we learned the hostility Millerand encountered in parliamentary circles in the course of the year 1915.

"He is entirely under the thumb of the army and the bureaucracy," Robert D. declared, "and that's disastrous!"

M. France agreed with him. He had no regard for Millerand, nor for Poincaré, either. He never revised his opinion of these two men.

Robert D., who was in close relations with Caillaux, was fond of telling the story of Poincaré's marriage and the religious consecration bestowed by the Bishop of Versailles, at the time of his candidateship for the presidency of the Republic.

Robert D. hadn't in the least forgiven his country for its entrance into the war, for he was an ardent Germanophile. He detested Lloyd George and spoke of him with bitterness as a clown, because, although a rabid partisan of peace at the Crown Council held in London the first days of August 1914,

he had become an equally rabid partisan of war after England's intervention.

"We can expect nothing of him but contradictions. He has betrayed us, he will betray everyone, including France. You will see that at the peace negotiations. France is playing England's game; she'll get the worst of it."

M. France agreed with this, too, but, as I have shown, with many reservations. Nevertheless he did not hide his lively sympathy for Caillaux, whom he considered the greatest political spirit France had produced since Jaurès. But contrary to Robert D., he didn't believe, he never believed, in his return to power.

M. France.—It's a great misfortune that Caillaux's return to the head of affairs would only be possible in the case of the country's defeat. People see in him only the logical negotiator for a conquered France. All those who look upon defeat as possible are resolved to call on him. But don't think for a minute that a victorious France would ever consent to call on him and support him.

In addition he pointed out, without condoning it, the deceitful attitude of Caillaux, who committed secret acts of imprudence, but upon every public occasion used warlike language suggestive of the most enraged nationalist. This deceitful attitude did not seem to M. France to be without its dangers. He feared for him also the fate of Jaurès.

"They will kill him," he often repeated, "he will not see the end of the war."

I do not think that the later mishaps of Caillaux greatly surprised M. France. He had foreseen and predicted them.

But he didn't succeed in breaking down the confidence of Robert D., who persisted in believing in the impending return of Caillaux. Didn't his friend "Ponnstot" prophesy it? The Chamber was favorable to him, Malvy supported him to his utmost and Painlevé was completely won over to him. In

spite of these assurances, M. France didn't believe Robert D., for although very much a party man and extremely devoted to his friends, he never committed any gross errors of judgment on the war. To be sure, he desired peace and very strongly, but not at the price of a defeat. He considered that war between the intellectually most advanced peoples of Europe was criminal, and yet he felt all the force of these uncontrolled imperialisms.

If M. France had some sense of national expediencies, Robert D. had only a sense of parliamentary expediencies. The one saw the country, the other saw only Parliament. M. France had no confidence in Parliament and pointed out its unpopularity.

We heard Robert D. very often. Already he counted Clemenceau the great adversary. In this he was not wrong, for it was Clemenceau who was one day to ask him to leave French territory and go back to his own country. But Robert D. nevertheless spoke truly and wisely when he maintained that of all the countries in the war, France was the one where the least truth was told, the one that was kept in the greatest ignorance and which, through its press, lived in a complete atmosphere of unreality and lies. He showed how Germany published statistics of the wounded and dead, how England acknowledged her maritime losses.

M. France.—You're right. In reading French papers you get the impression that the war is quite without danger and that we carry it on without losing a horse or a cannon or a ship. And yet . . .

It seemed probable that M. Robert D. was the agent of a French political coterie of which M. Caillaux was the leader and whose attitude during the war was under suspicion and even censured. M. Robert exhibited just this kind of partisan and patronage politics. I don't mean to maintain that such politics didn't have the secret sympathy of M. France. He re-

mained faithful to them but he had a great deal of acumen and saw better than any other, better than Robert D., all the obstacles in the way of such a program. For this reason, although he believed as a partisan, he raised formidable objections to the remarks and hopes of his friend.

---

There was also a lady added to the continually growing circle of M. France's friends. She was a foreigner and very beautiful. She had violet eyes and an abundant mass of chestnut hair rolled at the nape of her neck like the Tanagras. Her figure, although slight, was admirable, and her bearing like that of an antique goddess. When she appeared in M. France's drawing room wearing light silk clothes, one could see the lines of her magnificent body. She was graceful and supple and, as the Master said, seemed made expressly for love, to inspire love as well as to make it. The Master always overwhelmed her with attentions. He would kiss her hand with prolonged pleasure and his eyes would rest on her with a sort of tenderness, while other eyes, which I shall not name, but which can be easily guessed, looked at both of them with an uneasy and angry air. But those eyes have since been pacified.

Who this woman really was I was never able to learn, and if I knew I should not tell. I met her once in M. Painlevé's anteroom; he was at that time Minister of War. I saw her go into the ministerial office, conducted by the head of the civil cabinet, M. J., and taking precedence over the many generals who were waiting. What was her business there? I do not know, but she seemed to be on familiar terms with our political personnel and to use her connections to advantage. By what occult influence had she, a foreigner, succeeded in entering a world open to very few Frenchmen? She often spoke of her friend M. Barthou.



"Barthou!" enthused M. France, "what a charming, what a clever man!" But the irony of his remark was apparent.

M. France.—Barthou is such a kind, obliging person. He has never refused me a single thing. I always go to him when I need favors done. There's only one condition necessary to get what you want from him: you must never stand in his way. Ah, goodness, if anyone ever crossed his ambition. . . ." The Master did not finish.

Once he added, "He'll not be Minister again during the war. He had Caillaux, but was poisoned by this corpse." These words lead one to think that M. France knew something about the means used by Caillaux's enemies to bring about this fall, principally by making use of the ill-will of the first Mme. Caillaux and the papers she had in her possession. On this subject M. France was always very biting and openly showed his enduring sympathy for Caillaux.

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We saw, too, M. Courteline and his wife, who had also taken refuge at Tours and were living there. I have very pleasant memories of M. Courteline, in spite of his being very temperamental. For he was fiery, nervous, hot-headed and enthusiastic. The salon of La Bechellerie often resounded with his imprecations against the *Boches*. He had no love for them and no one could have been more in harmony with public opinion than he. M. France, who had a deep sympathy for his talents, let him go on talking and give free reign to his venom. He had no doubt about the victory. Ah no, not the least bit of doubt. He wanted to kill, massacre, destroy, and his vengeful hate admitted no discussion or contradiction. All the fantasies of his imagination were enlarged upon in spirited language. His naïveté was extreme. There wasn't a single improbable tale that M. Courteline wouldn't tell with

passion. M. France would sometimes say of him, "He speaks like Cherfils, but he's a much better talker."

And what faith he had! He had faith in everything, in our genius for improvisation, in the ability of our generals, even in the Russians! Yes, he believed in the Russians with a wilful indomitable persistence; the "steam roller" was no idle word to him.

Sober and excited by turns, he kept calculating the moves that separated the Russians from Berlin.

M. France, thus far apparently overcome by these heated dialectics, would then try to silence him and say something himself.

"No, Courteline, no, you're grossly exaggerating matters. Listen while I tell you something about Rappoport. Well, sometime ago, last August at the beginning of the war, in the lobby of the Chamber, Denys Cochin, with a map in his hands, ran into Rappoport and said to him:

"Ah! M. Rappoport, you're the very man I want to see, you must give me some information. Look at this map; here is where the Russians are" (and he pointed out the place on the map). "Tell me how much time they need to get to Berlin?"

"That's simple enough," answered Rappoport. "A week if they don't find anything in their way. If they do, then I'm sure I don't know."

"Well, they found the German army, so you see nobody knows. Perhaps never."

But this delicious story had no effect on M. Courteline, who went on worse than ever, measuring the distances with his arms.

"Your story is very amusing, my good Master," he shouted, "but it proves nothing. It's thirty years since Rappoport left Russia, he's no longer familiar with it. Besides, Russia has made some progress."

"Do you really think so?" interrupted M. France.

"Why, of course, of course. They may be in Berlin by Christmas. If they're not, just wait for spring, and you'll see."

"Wait for spring!" Words so often to be heard during those four years, too often words which, now at the beginning of the war, still had their full effect of promise and mirage.

"All right, we'll wait for spring," M. France said philosophically.

The most amusing dialogues were those between M. Courteline and Robert D., to whom I have already referred. Need I say that M. Courteline, who believed in the Russians, believed still more in the English. He showed this great people being systematically organized for the war, creating everything little by little to satisfy new needs, the army, the artillery, munitions. Courteline would wax enthusiastic, lyrical, prophetic. But Robert D., cold, stiff, with his dreadful accent, smoking his eternal cigarette replied:

"England has certainly made a splendid effort, but will she keep it up? Very soon—for enlistments are already slowing down—she'll be brought up against conscription. Will she use such a method? No measure would be more repugnant to her, more contrary to her temperament and customs; if it is rejected, what will become of us? Ireland is restless, revolt is brewing, Sir Casement has already organized the struggle there. Take my word for it, England is not united."

M. Courteline answered vigorously and very much to the point that once a country got into a war like this, it was no longer possible to stop, that necessity would impose whatever measures were unavoidable, even conscription, if the situation demanded it. And then besides, there was the London Agreement. The Allies couldn't afford to break up in the

common struggle. All of them together must pursue the war and stop only at victory.

Phlegmatic, still more cutting, slowly hissing his words through his teeth, the Englishman answered:

"Don't fool yourself. England has always known how to get out of a treaty. She considers it the product of certain circumstances, destined to disappear when they have disappeared. She'll know how to get out of the London agreement if it's necessary. England is a peaceful nation. She prefers trade to glory."

Beside himself, waving his arms so hard that his cuffs came loose, M. Courteline roared:

"But I tell you that's not true. England is hanging on to Germany like a bull-dog and the bull doesn't let go until he's had his bite."

"Allow me," began Robert D.

But the Master interrupted. Mlle. Laprevotte had tea and cake. Then a Russian in M. France's service appeared and announced:

"Here comes the 'steam-roller' . . ."

Then everybody laughed and the adversaries began to recover their self possession. Drinking his tea, M. Courteline, who is really the finest man in the world, said to Robert D.:

"You certainly get one excited."

After M. Courteline had gone, M. France would go so far as to pass judgment on him, always, indeed, in the friendliest way. "He has genius, yes, that's not too much to say, real genius, but he gets irrational when he talks about politics and the war."

One day while M. France and I were on this subject, I told him the following anecdote:

"M. Courteline was always a great one for playing bridge. Every evening at Tours he used to go to the *café de la Ville*

and meet his friends and begin playing bridge. It was just the time when the newsboys were out with the evening papers, and Mme. Courteline, who did not play, would buy one, look through it, and sometimes read aloud the evening despatches.

So she'd begin: "Last night, in the course of an engagement, our troops lost advance trench sections and a munition depot." At these words M. Courteline would throw down his cards and start a wholly unjustified scene with his wife. Epithets fell so thick that Mme. Courteline, who is very sensitive, began to cry. But besides having an even temperament, she also has a very practical intelligence. She soon understood her error and in the midst of her sobs, in a broken voice, picked up the paper again and began to read:

"But a vigorous counter-attack by our troops recovered not only the sections we had lost, but permitted a slight advance in the direction of X."

"You see," cried M. Courteline triumphant, "you see that the despatch isn't as bad as all that! You don't know how to read."

From then on Mme. Courteline knew how to read. Every evening she served her lord and master with despatches in a style that would have rapidly brought our victorious armies to the banks of the Rhine, if the war had not been a matter of hard and cold facts. From then on, too, M. Courteline lived happily in unadulterated optimism. Events were invariably interpreted in a favorable and somewhat unreal sense, so that there was always something strange in the nature of M. Courteline's opinions.

M. France laughed over this story. He never discussed the war very seriously with M. Courteline, but he said to me: "Courteline is certainly a lucky man, with a charming wife who has the tact to spare him from the real and bitter truths of these days."

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Besides the people already mentioned, many others came and went. But in addition to Parisians and foreigners, there were also the people of the locality. What good souls they were and how M. France did enjoy them! One of them was an employee in the administrative service of the railroad whom Mlle. Laprevotte, forgetting his name, insisted on calling him the Little Railroad. He had a passion for the beaux-arts, especially for the ancient. In M. France's words, he wouldn't recognize anything since the time of Pericles. And there was a doctor who had been for a time M. France's and Mlle. Laprevotte's physician. Another was a very ugly woman to whom M. France made such extreme compliments upon her beauty that she would say in an affected tone:

"Oh, Master, you exaggerate."

Then there was also my friend the Count de C., the faithful companion of my weekly walks. He has died since then. He was a philosopher and a metaphysician and tried to interest M. France in such complicated problems, but never had much success.

All of them finally realized that there were some absurdities the Master would not let pass. They had felt the benefit of his terrible irony, which sometimes inflicted on them, in an innocent form, such terrible lessons, that for a brief moment a strange embarrassment would come over the salon. But it was certainly a sight worth seeing, this interminable procession of imbeciles who came to sit down, stare, have their books autographed and disappear. M. France liked to put questions to them, ask them about the war, about what was going on. He enjoyed making them say the absurdest things, and when he succeeded—which wasn't difficult—he would chuckle delightedly over them.

There was Dr. J., who specialized in the most frightful humbug. For him, victory alone counted, no matter at what price it was bought.

"But what do the wounded have to say about this?" asked M. France.

"They are joyful and speak only of their desire to return to the front, to go on fighting. Their heroism is amazing."

"You are quite sure?" asked M. France.

"Absolutely certain, and I'll give you a sure proof of it. Why, this morning, at my hospital, the patient in bed forty said . . ."

But by this time M. France had turned his back on him and the story of number forty was lost in the general conversation. After Dr. J. had gone, M. France gave free rein to his indignation.

M. France.—What an idiot! He wants to have us believe that a man who has seen the horrors of war at close quarters, who has been disabled by them and who knows that he may remain so forever, that such a man wants to go back. It can't be true. It's impossible, it's contrary to human nature. All you can ask of a man who has been wounded—and even that's asking a great deal—is that he should have a sufficiently strong sense of duty to resign himself to going back. But that he should have any desire to do so is something beyond the power of human endurance. And it is just lies like these that create a spirit of hate and vengeance. What a dismal state of affairs."

Those present agreed with him. They agreed to whatever he said, although it was contrary, not to their ideas, for they never had any, but to the opinions they heard expressed everywhere about them.

Before M. France they did not dare to object, to express an opposing opinion. It was fun to hear them as they went back from La Bechellerie to Tours. Then they took their revenge for their servility and hypocrisy; and the same ones who only a moment before had been shaking their heads in approbation, now poured out all sorts of spiteful remarks.

M. France had reason to be suspicious of them, for he had no patriotic feelings. This wasn't surprising in a friend of Cailiaux's. He must be watched, for his talk could do much harm.

So a few good Tourainians opened up their perverse souls and vented their spleen. What they forgave M. France last for was their own cowardice. They tore him to pieces by way of thanking him for his gracious welcome, his charming talk from which there wafted something like an aroma of kindness only slightly tinged with scorn. I know that M. France was aware of these little treacheries. He was never annoyed by them, for he was inclined to believe that no matter in what corner of the inhabited world one went, man would be invariably wicked and stupid. Nevertheless he said to me one day, alluding to these troubles:

"I'm not very far from believing with Balzac, who detested the Tourainians. Your compatriots are wicked and vain."

## CHAPTER III

### THE WAR AND LITERATURE

THE winter of 1915 didn't favor long discussions of the war: we were awaiting events. Now and then M. France would read us a letter coming from the trenches telling of some injustice; but, in the Master's own words, the war was receding into the realm unknown. Nobody could predict when it would end.

Once there came to La Bechellerie a lady of mature years accompanied by a stout gentleman. She wore a gray dress with an extremely low neck and was enveloped in a cloud of white gauze which contrasted strangely with the winter temperature and made one feel like shivering. She was Mme. M., the novelist, and the stout gentleman was M. F., the prefect of Maine-et-Loire. Mme. M. naturally spoke of Jules Lemaître, and told of his last days and death. She boasted much of her devoted attention to him, and of how when she used to take him out for a walk on the Avenue du Bois, he was helpless as a child. With mingled bitterness and regret, she characterized Lemaître's bequest of his library to the children of Léon Daudet as an act of notorious ingratitude.

What was this woman's object in coming to La Bechellerie? She alone knew. But Mlle. Laprevotte's reception of her was so cold that the Master, in spite of all his kindness, was embarrassed. As for the Prefect, he did his best to dissuade M. France from remaining in Touraine and proposed that he should come to Anjou, where he had found a magnificent estate at a very cheap price.

Mme. M. returned several times. Each time we remarked

upon how thin the Prefect kept getting, and we became genuinely worried over his condition. He seemed to be fading away right under our eyes. Then one day we learned that he was dead. The news didn't surprise us and was the occasion for a few savory remarks by M. France which scarcely bear repetition.

M. France.—The poor Prefect, that was to be feared. It finishes all of us. But what an idea for a man of his age. How imprudent, with Lemaître's example before him. This lady is of the same country as Jesus Christ. Her father practiced the most ridiculous trades. He acted as a guide to the foreigners and English who visited Judea and took care of their needs. He sold them letters and autographs of Jesus Christ and Saint Paul, and these innocents paid him a good price for them."

Mme. M. never returned to La Bechellerie again.

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M. France had not been very well all winter and had kept to his room. It was there I went to be with him. He sat alone over by the fireplace. His room had a fine four-poster bed and on the wall the entire collection of the drawings of that excellent artist Prudhon, of whom M. France was particularly fond and of whom he spoke in the most affectionate terms. On a little table by the fireplace, in the midst of papers and books, was a marble antique, a mutilated representation of a woman's body; no head or arms, simply the neck and shoulders, the breast, the hips and the thighs. It was so perfectly beautiful that I could not conceal my admiration.

"Yes," he replied, "nobody will ever do any better than that." Picking up the statuette, he pointed out its beauties, caressing the hips and the thighs with his hand.



"How beautiful it is. Representation of the human body reached its perfection in this."

It was on this very day, in the silence of this little room and the peacefulness of twilight, that M. France spoke to me for the first time of the Dreyfus affair.

M. France.—It was a great and beautiful crisis of the conscience. At bottom it's the last event that profoundly moved the country. The faith of a Bernard Lazare was something sublime, likewise the fraternal devotion of Mathieu Dreyfus. Alas, why was Commandant Dreyfus so antipathetic! Nothing, not a word of encouragement, not one real cry of innocence and indignation. One felt only too clearly that, a military man before everything, he disapproved of the campaign that was being conducted in his behalf because it might do harm to the army. He feared that more than anything else.

I gave a sign of surprise and astonishment.

M. France.—Yes, that's the truth of the matter. Do you want me to tell you what I really think? One had the suspicion that if Commandant Dreyfus hadn't been the hero of the cause, he would have been ardently, ferociously anti-Dreyfus. "Why," he said to himself: "do you know, what has always saved me is that at any period of my life whatever I have always slept perfectly." So we, we his defenders, frequently passed sleepless nights, agitated by the decisions we had to make or the course to pursue, but he, the interested principal, slept on peacefully. He even slept the night before his military degradation, the night before the Rennes trial. Don't you consider that mad? Particularly amusing were the meetings of the principal friends of Dreyfus at which the campaign was worked out. There were Mathieu Dreyfus, Clemenceau, Jaurès, De Pressense, Briand, and myself. Hours flew quickly by. Jaurès walked up and down speaking the next day's article, De Pressense interrupted him and made a long speech which Jaurès answered at equal length, Clemen-

ceau talked about this and that or told stories about the generals. Finally Dreyfus would bring us back to the point and ask for our decisions. We scarcely knew where we were at by then. Then Briand would come to the rescue. He summarized the question in a few brief, simple words which everyone greeted with relief. He proposed a solution that seemed to follow naturally from his remarks with an incomparable logic. He inspired us with his decision, and a few minutes later we were the ones who were trying to persuade him to stand by it. He would make some objections, then acquiesce. In the course of these conventicles we never came to any decisions other than those suggested by Briand; if they didn't succeed it was our fault and not his. Didn't I tell you so! was the reproach he never failed to make.

It was at a time when Briand was still playing a rather insignificant rôle, as keeper of the Seal, in the Viviani cabinet, reconstructed during the early days of the war. I asked M. France whether he thought he'd ever see him playing a more considerable rôle.

M. France.—You can rest assured that he'll be President of the Council and negotiator of the peace. He's already having it rumored abroad that he always advised against the departure of the government to Bordeaux, and that it's he who wanted Paris to be defended. This is how he always plays the same rôle with the same ingenuity. He represents himself as hostile to unpopular measures, the partisan of those that have succeeded. The victory of the Marne is his work!

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I saw M. France again at the end of September 1915. It was magnificent weather. M. France received us in the shade of the elms that grew to the right of La Bechellerie. Mlle. Laprevotte shielded herself from the heat of the sun in one of those canopied chairs one ordinarily sees on the beaches.

The Master and his friends were scattered here and there in chairs and benches. Mlle. Laprevotte served us cakes prepared under her own supervision, we had refreshing drinks and listened to the Master talk on various topics. The sun cast its last rays over the woods of the valley of the Choisille, from which arose slight mist.

The Master spoke of the artillery crisis, the lack of cannons and projectiles that the latest offensive had revealed.

M. France.—I've been told that it's General B. who is the big obstacle at the Ministry to a solution of the problem of armaments and munitions. He doesn't want heavy artillery at any price; he claims that it's of no use, that it gets stuck on the roads and hinders the movements of the troops. That's stupid, because the fronts are stationary and it's doubtful if the war of manœuvres will ever reappear. Well, Millerand supports General B., and as he is very stubborn, there's nothing to be hoped for from him.

—Nevertheless, Master, someone observed, much progress has been made. Albert Thomas has already made important purchases and Millerand himself contributes a great deal of labor.

M. France.—No doubt, no doubt. But do you know how Millerand works? He's an indefatigable worker, he stays from twelve to fourteen hours at his work-table annotating reports, covering the margins with orders. He makes cannons out of red pencil, he believes what he has written fully realized and the cannon ready to start for the front.

As for Albert Thomas, I know him too. There couldn't have been a happier man the evening of the assassination of Jaurès. People who saw him that night told me that in spite of his bewailing and the sorrow he affected, there was a sort of flame of joy in his eyes. Jaurès did, in fact, stand in his way. Many things would have been impossible to accomplish under the clear eyes of a man who had such a lofty conscience

and such a profound knowledge of the weaknesses of his disciple. I have no confidence in Albert Thomas. I do not mean to slight his talents, which are real, and his astuteness, which is profound.

As we returned to La Bechellerie along the terrace bordering it on the rear, chance placed me at M. France's side. I told him that I had read an article of his in the *Bulletin des Armes de la République*, and that I had bought a volume at Champion's composed of his articles on the war.

M. France.—Yes, I spoke and wrote exactly like my house-keeper. I'm ashamed of it, but I had to do it.

What did the Master mean? It would have been indiscreet to ask him, but I had the impression that day and on other occasions that M. France's liberty was not as complete and assured as he would have desired. M. France had too European and universal an outlook not to feel himself assailed on all sides by cries of misery, suffering and pity. I believe that his real desire would have been not to deny this appeal but to speak the words for which all looked toward him because he alone could pronounce them. But it seems that his courage under the circumstances was not as lofty as his intentions, which were always noble and fine. He resigned himself not without some sadness, to the necessity of adding his voice to the general chorus of denunciations. When he had tried to point out the difference between German imperialism and the German people, a general hue and cry had been raised. He learned then that it was best to speak the way everyone else did or keep quiet.

One evening in this same September the Master received us in the recently installed library of the little summer house that opened on the garden. The lovely sight I saw then will remain in my mind's eye for a long, long time. Books covered the shelves up to the ceiling. There were all sizes, from the heavy folios of the Bollandists and theologians that Hamilcar



had once looked upon, down to the little libertine books of the XVIIIth century whose licentious engravings M. France loved to look at. There were books by the thousands. The large glass door facing the garden was open and the sun shone cheerfully into the room, playing on the gold of the volumes, on their faun-colored or red bindings. The bright ray moved across the room, lighting up the various parts as it went.

M. France, sitting at his large table in his wing chair, played with an ivory paper knife. His red plush cap set slightly back on his head, uncovering the thick white hair that grew down to his magnificent forehead. The light struck the scarlet cap and the silver hair at the same time. The noble and beautiful face of the great Master in this setting of books, seemed that of a humanist of the XVIth century come to life in our midst. He was like another Erasmus, and it would have taken another Holbein to have painted him. I have never seen M. France so completely in an atmosphere appropriate to the quality of his thought and to the way we like to imagine him when we read his books.

The Master watched dusk drop behind the trees and the familiar horizon. The conversations was on war literature, its merit and its possible endurance.

M. France.—I have no faith either in its value or its endurance. In a few years all these accounts of the war will be unreadable, they will interest nobody, they'll fall into oblivion. They are born in a period of enthusiasm and are the products of an exasperated state of feeling. They correspond to one moment of opinion and will die with it. All these accounts of the trenches have no intrinsic value, they'll be like the speeches of our politicians. There will be only one desire, to forget them, for they correspond to an epoch which, when the enthusiasm has died out, will appear abominable.

M. France, a few years later, had to make only two exceptions *Le Feu*, by Barbusse, and *Les Mémoires d'un Rat*.



"The former," he said, "because it is true and shows the war in its exact light. This book has beauty, real beauty: One seems to see suffering and unfortunate humanity writhing under one's very eyes. The latter, because it will bear witness to the far-fetched means we had to use to tell the truth during the war. It's only under the veil of fable and allegory that anyone will be able to utter a few words of common sense and wisdom during these difficult years."

Finding ourselves alone, M. France questioned me upon my military situation and what would become of me when my leave was over.

"I don't know," I answered. "With the military administration one must be prepared for a future full of uncertainty. However, I saw a circular of Millerand's which provides that men in my profession may become officers in the gendarmery. I should like to try for it."

The very idea of Millerand's circulars plunged M. France into an irrepressible gaiety.

M. France.—My poor friend, how can you put stock in anything like Millerand's circulars? He signs them by the dozens every day without even knowing what they contain, and they fall immediately into oblivion. This man confuses writing with action. Nevertheless I'd like to help you in some way—I'll write to Millerand myself.

M. France took a sheet of paper and a pen, and wrote. A few moments later he handed me a letter. It was three pages long. There were three lines devoted to me, the remainder was devoted to compliments to Millerand: praise of his activity, of his work, of his methods, of his capacity for organization, the rôle he was playing, the author of victory he would be. . . .

I returned the letter to M. France with no other comment than my deepest thanks. He thought he detected a certain surprise in my eyes.

M. France.—This letter seems to surprise you; my poor friend, you don't know these men in office. It's more important for the success of your project that I say nice things about them than about you. It's no concern of his what I think of you; but he'll be sensitive to what I may have to say about him. That may perhaps arouse his interest and it will certainly be the only reason that will move him to act.

In spite of this excellent letter I was not appointed gendarme.

We walked across the garden, chatting. M. France spoke of Romain Rolland whom he did not appear to like. He praised his courage, but he considered his stay in Switzerland most inadvisable.

He spoke of Tolstoi, and here his tone became more serious.

M. France.—Tolstoi! What a genius and what a beautiful soul. He had the rare courage to harmonize his acts with his principles. Preaching poverty and the disdain of worldly goods, he gave them up to die in a railway-station like a traveling stranger. His death conformed to his doctrine, and that is beautiful. I too, who profess similar ideas, should have the strength to give everything up as he did. But the Slavs have a logic peculiar to themselves, the Latin hasn't it and never will have. At the thought of leaving my furniture, my pictures and my books, I realize how impossible it would be. My life is without logic, hesitation fills my soul and the act that would correspond to my thoughts and writings I know I shall not perform.

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It was toward the end of the year 1915 that I lunched for the first time at M. France's with M. and Mme. Courteline.

Courteline was sparkling with wit.

The conversation began with Jules Lemaître, apropos of

the visit of the lady with the long gray veils already referred to.

Courteline.—Do you know what happened to Lemaître one day when he refused to satisfy one of his friend's caprices? They went out together, the lady apparently very calm, and Lemaître feeling at ease, under the impression that the scene had quieted down. They walked along the boulevard together, but as they were crossing the Place de l'Opera under the protection of the policeman, the lady suddenly lay down right in the street with an attack of nerves. Lemaître tried to calm her by making all sorts of fine promises, a wholly futile attempt, for she went on kicking and having spasms. There was a great commotion and a crowd gathered. Only the policeman was able to help her up and calm her, saying to Lemaître as he did so, "You certainly must be pretty mean to make such a nice little woman cry."

With what spirit, what animation, what gestures, Courteline told us this story! Then he spoke of his youth, of his life at Montmartre and particularly of how his friends diverted him with music in his apartment one day when he was sick and how he was put out on account of it.

Courteline.—Did you ever meet Verlaine? I'll tell you how I met him.

Every evening after I left the ministry I used to take my *apéritif* with some friends in a little café opposite the *Théâtre Français*. We found Verlaine there and I was introduced to him. When my friends had gone, I offered him a second *apéritif* out of pure politeness, and he accepted.

What a big mistake I made!

For I did not know that Verlaine, being alcoholic, could drink one *apéritif* without danger, but that the second plunged him into complete drunkenness and deprived him of all sense. . . . I soon got up to go, dragging Verlaine behind me staggering. Not knowing how to get rid of him, I hailed a

cab and offered to take him home. I got in reply only a vague gesture that I took for assent. Somehow I got him into the cab, only—think of it—I didn't know his address. Where do you live, I asked? No answer. I persisted. In Montmartre, Belleville, Menlimontant, Montrouge, Place de L'Italia. No answer. The Bastille? At this word Verlaine made a vague gesture that seemed to mean yes. Ah, at last, I thought. At least that's something definite, it's somewhere near the *Bastille*! I began to enumerate all the streets that ran into this square. Boulevard Beaumarchais? . . . Rue St. Antoine? Verlaine, who was dozing at the back of the carriage, made a sign, and I breathed a sigh of relief. Now all I needed was the number, I began with one and went on, yes, my dear Master, I went on like that up to 232. Verlaine lived at 232 faubourg St. Antoine. We finally got there and I gave Verlaine over to his landlady, who didn't seem at all astonished. Free of him at last, I was about to get into the same cab and go home when the driver stopped me. "Give me my money," he shouted, "I've had enough of taking drunkards home. My carriage isn't made for sots."

Such was my first meeting with Verlaine. It cured me forever of any desire to offer him an *apéritif*.

A drunkard, shiftless, full of enthusiasm and fire, accessible to every possible hope and every possible discouragement, Verlaine seemed like a brother to Choulette.

Madame Courteline reminded her husband that it was time for the daily bridge at the Café de la Ville.

"Curly head, are you coming?"

For Madame Courteline, when her lord and master is very silly,—which occasionally happens—calls him pretty names like this. Courteline has thin straight hair that grows down to his collar. Such nicknames as curly head are really very funny.

Quite docile, Courteline took leave of us.

After his departure, M. France spoke of Courteline.

"He really has the 'vis comica.' His works will last because in a few he has managed to realize the eternal comic. Consider Boubouroche, how funny and true it is. When I'm very much bored, too depressed and melancholy, as at this moment, I pick up a volume of Courteline and catch myself laughing over it to myself."



## CHAPTER IV

### SOME HISTORICAL CHARACTERS

**W**HAT I admired most in M. France was his prodigious memory. Not only did he know an infinite number of things, but even at this age, with a lightness, with a delicacy all his own, he knew how to use them to make his conversation rich, clear, interesting. M. France was an exquisite, an incomparable talker; not that he was eloquent—he spoke on the contrary with a certain strain, a certain difficulty, and his sentences were frequently strewn with: “Yes, isn’t it so”; “Ah, well”; “Then I said”; “It’s a thing”;—which rather cluttered the expression of his thoughts. But there was no richer, no more fruitful mind. He had the faculty of turning the most usual remarks into the most judicious and profound reflections. One sometimes feared that he would never get through his sentences, but his mind shed such an illuminating light on his hearers, that they understood his thoughts even before he translated them into jerky language. He was continually complaining about his faulty memory. “At my age, you stop remembering,”—a coquettishness in this great man who had such a fine memory. How many times he recited us entire passages from Racine, for whom he had an unreserved admiration, as well as from André Chenier, the poet, for whom he had a mild affection. He used to say of Racine: “He’s the most Greek of all our poets, all the charm of ancient Hellas has gone into his verses. No others but the incomparable teachers of Port-Royal could have given their pupil such a complete knowledge of the Greek genius.”

Apropos of an unexpected conversation of which Cardinal

de Retz was the subject, a discussion arose over the words addressed by Queen Anne of Austria to Mlle. de Chevreuse; "Minx, you do me as much good as harm."

M. France.—He refers to the matter himself in his *Mémoires*. I'll prove it to you in a minute.

Indeed, M. France disappeared into the little study adjoining the salon—today Mme. France's little XVIIIth century Chinese salon—and soon reappeared holding in his hand a small volume, which he opened. Putting on his large shell-rimmed glasses, he read us the passage and put an end to the discussion by showing us that he was right.

He loved Memoirs and had read many of them. He didn't value them all equally, but was very discriminating. He declared Saint Simon's to be the most false.

M. France.—He saw nothing in its true light, neither the Court, nor the King; for everything connected with them is spoiled, falsified by his immense vanity, his preoccupation with the nobility, his eternal question of precedence. Everything is referred to the unique question of the honors to which a duke and a peer are entitled. Nevertheless he could understand and judge his enemies in a wonderful way. As he had a great many of them, he was enabled to understand not a few people.

The memoirs on the revolution interested him particularly, as did the Revolution itself, of which he spoke frequently. He admitted to us that he had taken many of the details used in *Les Dieux Ont Soif* from the memoirs of Beugnot.

One day the conversation on the Revolution led him to speak of Louis XVI.

M. France.—I am of the same opinion as General Thiebault, I think that Louis XVI was wicked. I suppose you know Thiebault's story of how, while the king was walking on the terrace of the Tuileries, he was annoyed by the barks of a little dog, which pursued him in spite of the vain efforts

of his mistress to call him off. Furious, Louis XVI struck the dog with his stick and broke his back. The dog died right under his eyes, while his mistress collapsed in tears. That's a horrible episode; the man who does a thing like that with sang-froid is a wicked man. Louis XVI was, besides, stupid, weak, timorous. The only woman who had any power over the king was his wife, and he never understood her. If Louis XVI had had the courage of his great ancestor Louis XIV, or even the egoism of Louis XV, there never would have been a Revolution. The popular movements which swept away the monarchy were weak and superficial. They could have been easily suppressed if the king had so wished, or if he had only been willing to let others do it. The queen, in spite of all her courage, didn't have enough for the two of them.

Thiebault is really the first memoir writer of his time. His style is imaginative, lively, convincing; it is life itself reproduced without any attempt to influence the reader.

Thiebault led M. France to speak of Napoleon. It was one of his favorite subjects. He returned to it continually to tell various anecdotes about the Emperor, even the most insignificant details, or to pass judgments upon his work and personality. Whether he liked him or not is difficult to say, but he was undoubtedly attracted by his personality.

M. France.—His genius is beyond doubt. His intelligence is average, perhaps somewhat inferior; he was fundamentally a military man and, like all of them, not very intelligent. One must not confuse intelligence with genius; they are two very dissimilar endowments. There are some geniuses who have been intelligent, but very few. I think Julius Caesar was one of these, but I doubt if Napoleon was another.

Napoleon was a genius, but a military genius; there alone he is incomparable. He had an instinct for arranging masses, he knew how to apply them at the right moment to the right place. This marvelous sense of expediency, of the various

possibilities of action, was never possessed by another person to the same degree. Ah, if he were here now, he would have very soon found a way to put an end to trench-warfare. He would have invented another theatre of operations and forced a decision. He was a man with an imagination, yes, an astonishing imagination. And in war that's a thing more necessary than is commonly believed.

M. France's attention was called to Napoleon's talents for organization, to the administrative work he conducted himself, the audacity and the prudence he displayed on the 18th *Brumaire* on getting the power into his own hands.

M. France.—I must interrupt you. On the 18th *Brumaire* Bonaparte was in despair and confusion and it wasn't his fault that everything didn't miscarry. Just recall his hesitation, his evasions, his unintelligible stammering attempt to address the Tribune. Without his brother Joseph he would have been lost. Cambacères and Pourtalès say that in the sessions of the Council of State during the discussion of the Civil Code, his observations were very often entirely beside the point, that they were of no value and superfluous, that he spoke just to show he knew what it was all about. It is true that he understood things very readily and was therefore able to assimilate a subject and discuss it afterwards with alacrity that aroused the admiration of his hearers.

The only things he really ever knew were his military and naval positions. He knew down to a man, even to a cannon, just what he had at his disposal.

We tried to bring M. France back to the subject of Napoleon's success as an organizer of France after the 18th *Brumaire* and the anarchy of the directory.

M. France.—No doubt his genius for organization appeared in a brilliant light, but the framework and instruments of the process were already there, he did not create them. Everything had been prepared by the great revolutionary laws, all



he had to do was to set the machinery going. I realize that he succeeded in doing it, and with a vigorous energy. But after all, he didn't make the machine.

M. France could have gone on speaking of Napoleon like this all day long. Again and again some new feature, some new anecdote would suggest itself to him and he would tell it.

M. France.—He was handsome at the time David d'Angers was modeling him. His profile was splendid, though later he got rather flabby. But at the time David d'Angers made his sculpture, what a fire there was in his look, what power in the whole physiognomy and how easy it is to understand the influence he exercised. Thiebault gives an instance of this when Bonaparte was named commander in chief of the army in Italy.

The generals who were going to be put under his orders were upset at being subordinated to such a young general, and an unknown one besides. A politicians' general, grumbled Massena, who was more exasperated than any of them and threatened to speak his mind to the newcomer. . . . Bonaparte arrived, received his subordinates, dictated his orders to them, addressing himself especially to Massena. No one stirred, Massena least of all. Once outside the generals discussed their reactions and Massena admitted that this little runt of a man had frightened him.

M. Taine was much struck with this account and he used it, I believe, in his *Origines*. To really understand it you must look at David d'Angers' work. This man must indeed have given such an impression of forcefulness, of power, of calculated and concentrated will, that one can understand the attitude of poor Massena. The authority he exercised over everyone was all that kept things going at certain times. Nevertheless, how fragile the Empire was. Merely at the rumor of his death, which was Mallet's conspiracy, everything nearly collapsed. So this formidable empire, so vast, so ex-



tended, was one night at the mercy of a false report circulated by an audacious general. Wasn't that proof that this empire was artificial and ephemeral, because it was not the work of the time, upon which alone greatness depends, but of a single man who, no matter how great he was, could not go beyond his own height. He understood this himself, when he said he would have liked to have been his grandson,—a signal homage rendered to heredity. Louis XIV was also confronted by coalitions. He was able to overcome them and his power was not shaken by defeat because his power didn't proceed from himself alone. He had tradition in back of him, which guarantees continuity, and Napoleon didn't have it. His power rested solely upon victory. The day when this permanent and necessary victory disappeared, everything would fall to pieces along with it.

I heard M. France repeat very often his sentiments on the artificial and fragile powers that proceed from a single man or a current of opinion. No one understood better than he how weak and uncertain such powers are. He frequently called attention to the former monarchy and how it was able to survive several centuries because of its substantial basis. I am convinced that in spite of his revolutionary and later Bolshevik ideas he didn't share in the unfortunate errors which XIXth century historians propagated with regard to the Ancient Régime. Of course, he was aware of its faults—what régime hasn't them—but he didn't deny its obvious virtues. According to him no century except the XVIIIth had granted so much liberty to men of letters.

M. France.—Do you think that many régimes would have tolerated such sharp criticism as those of Montesquieu, Diderot, d'Alembert and the Encyclopedists? The Revolution which ushered in, they say, the era of liberty wasn't very generous at the time of its power to its detractors and critics. The Terror is evidence of this. Napoleon spent his reign in

pursuing Mme. de Stael and Benjamin Constant, he mobilized his police and aroused Fouche against them. Mme. de Stael gave him nearly as much concern as the continental blockade. And that's saying a great deal.

Here's another example. There's Voltaire, the friend, correspondent, and guest of Frederick II during the Seven Years' War. Did the monarchy declare him a traitor to his country, did it hound him, pursue him? Compare it to-day with the suspicion that hangs over Caillaux for having done twenty times less than what Voltaire did. We must admit that in the XVIIIth century it was possible to be European and French at the same time; since the Revolution that has become impossible. The Revolution modified the idea of nationality by restricting it.

These were favorite ideas with M. France and he was fond of expressing them. They gave evidence of his complete, his perfect liberty of spirit, of the absolute independence of his judgment, of the impartiality of his opinions and of the slight homage he paid to his own political attitude.

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One Sunday I found M. France alone for a moment. He was reading Bossuet's *Oraisons Funébres*.

M. France.—You've come just at the right time. Listen to how beautiful this is. "Rejoice, Prince, in the victory. Rejoice in it eternally because of the immortal valor of this sacrifice. Accept these last offerings of a voice that was not strange to you. You will put an end to all these discourses. Instead of deploring the death of others, great Prince, henceforth I want to learn from you how to make my own holy: happy if, warned by this white head of the account I must soon give of my humble office, I can devote to the flock it is my duty to nurture with the words of life, the remnants of a failing voice, a dying ardor."

What a style, what splendor! You may be sure that's one

of the most beautiful passages in the French language. I read it to Mlle. Laprevotte. She said: "How very beautiful, how very beautiful!"

A sudden and spontaneous admiration like that is the best criterion for beauty.

Some visitors arrived just then and the Master told them what we were talking about.

M. France.—I was just reading one of the most splendid specimens of the French language. I'll read it over for you. There are a great many ways of saying that one is a bishop. Do you think there's a more imposing and magnificent one than that used by Bossuet: "give an account of my humble office." What nobility! There couldn't be words more simple, more concrete, more banal, and yet look at the majestic effect of the whole phrase.

From Bossuet we passed on to Pascal, for whom the Master seemed to have more admiration than tenderness.

M. France.—I don't understand him very well. There is something cold in his genius and I am inclined to believe that as a man he was very disagreeable. You know that to insure his salvation Pascal, like many people in the XVIIIth century, kept a pauper, a real pauper, whom he took care of, nursed, received in his home and who was, so to speak, the element and material of his salvation. Pascal took the matter very seriously. Well, Mme. Perier, his sister who had no pauper, wanted to take him away from her brother under the pretext that Pascal was too ill himself to keep him. Pascal made such violent threats that Mme. Perier was obliged to yield. But this little incident furnishes proof for my charge: Pascal was not genuinely good. Besides, did you ever know of a bigot who was?

One of those present raised an objection to this and spoke warmly of Port-Royal where, in his opinion, devoutness and goodness went hand-in-hand.

M. France admired Port-Royal, the beautiful lives of the solitaries, the nobility of their character, the rather haughty and unfeeling grandeur of their ideal. . . . He spoke of it sympathetically and from time to time revealed to us the extent of his erudition on this subject as on so many others. I have heard him give us a topography of *Port-Royal des Champs*, even indicating the position of the principal parts of the monastery. He expressed his indebtedness to M. André Hallays for his minute researches at Paris and in the *Vallée de Chevreuse* to recover traces of the vanished Port-Royal.

M. France.—These men were very great and very severe. Yet they were capable of affection all the same. They loved the child Racine and that's their finest title to glory. If Racine had been brought up without affection he would never have been able to reveal in his life that lovely soul of his made for passion and love. These men were good, only their exterior was glacial. M. Nicole had a rare soul, M. Lancelot must have been a delightful person, and what a pleasing character M. Hamon seems.

He was a physician, took care of the sick of the community and went about on an old horse throughout the neighborhood of the convent. Not to neglect his studies or lose time, M. Hamon had attached to the pommel of his saddle an iron stand supporting a desk on which there always lay an open book. So, M. Hamon, obliged to travel about, didn't waste any time in superfluous reflections or temptations. To the slight jolts of his horse across woods or fields, he would read some passage of Scripture or some thick volume of the Fathers. Isn't that charming and can we say that men who lived like this wasted their lives? Can't you see M. Hamon mounted on his horse reading and praying?

M. France had a great deal of admiration for these solitaries, but he wouldn't have been himself if he hadn't found an excuse to tell a joke on them. "For, after all, these great



men," he said, "must have had their weaknesses. Their arrogance was tremendous, and it's with good cause that the bishop of Paris, M. Hardouin de Perefex, said of the nuns of Port-Royal that they were as pure as angels and as arrogant as devils."

M. France.—Do you know the story of the great Arnaud and M. de Sacy? M. de Sacy had a secretary who was, it seemed, admirable. In addition to an ardent zeal for work he had a profound knowledge of the Fathers and such a fine memory that he could find almost immediately the passage that happened to be needed. The great Arnaud had heard of this model secretary and thought, no doubt, that here was the very man for him. One day he asked M. de Sacy to lend him his secretary for an urgent piece of work. M. de Sacy, who was not blind to the designs of the great Arnaud on his secretary, consented, but before he went any further put his collaborator wise to the situation. The faithful secretary understood what must be done. He went to Arnaud, who received him kindly and asked him question after question without getting a single answer. All the time the secretary kept smiling, gently shaking his head this way and that, giving little grunts of assent, but not uttering a single word. At the end of some hours of this difficult collaboration Arnaud sent the secretary back, and upon meeting M. de Sacy a little later, expressed his astonishment.

"I can't understand your secretary's reputation, I wasn't able to get a word out of him. He seemed very stupid to me. I must confess I don't see what use he can be to you."

"I'm satisfied with him," M. de Sacy said humbly, happy to have been able to keep his secretary by means of this strategy.

It was a great experience to hear M. France tell these little stories in his benign and fatherly way, his beautiful hands playing all the while with his shell-rimmed glasses.



In the course of this conversation a lady said to him in a sweet and caressing voice, "Master, you have very beautiful hands."

This rather bald but sincere compliment made the Master smile.

"Yes, Madame," he answered, "but only in the summer. In the winter they are not quite as nice."

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M. France's conversations on Antiquity were copious and full of varied material. It was from the question of the negotiations of the future peace that we indirectly got on to this subject.

One of us asked what could be expected of the peace, given the nationalistic and imperialistic tendencies of the countries at war.

"Europe's going to be broken up into pieces. It's a grave error to prepare for peace upon a basis as fragile and controvertible as the principle of nationality."

M. France.—That's exactly my own opinion. If peace doesn't end in the rapprochement of the people in a United States of Europe, it will have been nothing but a failure.

Dr. B., who had one of the clearest minds of all M. France's friends, called attention to the fact that we were gradually getting away from this conception. "The chimera of the liberty of oppressed peoples will balkanize Europe."

M. France.—This will be an inevitable source of new conflicts.

Dr. B.—A German peace dominating the world is not to be thought of, but their idea of *Pax Germanica* is not without a certain greatness. It would at least assure the world work and rest for several centuries.

M. France.—Doubtlessly, but unfortunately for the world,

the Germans are not the Romans. Their faults are too great and their dream of universal domination is impossible. Ah, if they had the virtues of the Romans! Think of the greatness of the work of ancient Rome, of its solidity. It defied time in so far as such a thing is possible to a human monument. For three centuries there was no fighting except within the limits of the Empire. The rest of the universe enjoyed the fruits of peace. Never since has humanity reached the same point. Will it ever again? Three centuries during which men could devote themselves peacefully to their tasks, during which they felt the security of their property, their persons, their families, maintained by the most solid authority that has ever existed. A splendid epoch in which the longest kind of labors could be undertaken in safety and calm. Rome made laws and roads. The roads brought people closer, and the laws assured the security of their intercourse. It was like this from Brittany to the banks of the Danube, from Spain to the Rhine. The entire Mediterranean basin enjoyed the benefits of the Roman administration. The greatness of the Empire was felt by all. Remember what Apuleius tells in *The Golden Ass*. The man changed into an ass succumbs to the weight of his burdens and his misery, and, falling to earth, utters but a single cry of hope: "Cæsar!" Yes, Cæsar, and from all corners of the Empire the same cry of hope was raised against every suffering, every injustice. The apostle Paul himself made this same appeal to justice because he was a Roman citizen. Doesn't that seem very magnificent to you and evidence of a social condition the like of which we shall perhaps never see again? All the progress accomplished in the realm of science and matter will never give humanity a superior civilization.

Dr. B.—Nevertheless, Master, wasn't this period more attractive in appearance than in reality? Nero and the burn-

ing of Rome, the persecution of the Christians, the accounts of Suetonius and Tacitus—these don't describe a very attractive age, do they?

M. France.—You're the victim of an optical illusion. In the first place, you take Rome for the Empire, which is a regrettable confusion. Even admitting that certain Cæsars were abominable tyrants and that they killed and despoiled the patricians who lost favor with them, and that all the accounts of Tacitus are true—which is doubtful, for he had many prejudices—do you really think that the Empire in general was profoundly affected by all this? I scarcely think so. The citizens at Carthage, at Athens, in Gaul, in the Italian cities, lived very tranquilly and only very vague rumors reached them from Rome. They attended to their work under a beneficent and just administration, the most just we know of. The burning of Rome couldn't have made a very great impression outside of Italy. Rome may have been affected, but the Empire was certainly not. It's possible to exist in troubled periods and yet live very peaceably through it all. Just look at the present era, which is one of the most tragic the world has ever known. Is existence profoundly changed for those who haven't been mobilized? Don't we go on eating, enjoying ourselves, attending to our business? Why wouldn't it have been just like this in former times?

Dr. B.—The Christians, Master, you forget the Christians.

M. France.—Bah! I am inclined to think that the persecutions were over-emphasized by the Christian conquerors. The Christians were only persecuted because they were bad, undesirable citizens, refusing to pay taxes and to submit to military service. The cult of the Emperor and of the imperial Divinity was obligatory. It was the deification of Rome itself. That was its only cult. The Christians, in refusing to sacrifice to it, to burn a few grains of incense before

the statue of Augustus, were really defying all Rome and menacing it by their resistance. The early Christians lived in a state of exaltation that was infinitely dangerous. They looked for the end of the world from one day to another. Is such a belief consistent with the existence of an organized society? Men who have their eyes fixed incessantly on an impending moment, a frightful cataclysm, can but prove bad citizens, heedless of existing laws. They preached the excellence of celibacy and that too must have been odious to the Romans, who saw in the decrease of births a weakening of Rome, a danger to its greatness.

If the Christians had been content to introduce, as so many foreign cities had done with little difficulty, a new divinity into the Roman Pantheon, no doubt they would have been left alone. But they worshipped a jealous, an exclusive god, who wished to stand alone and would tolerate no others. Yes, this new god wanted to be the sole god, and Rome could not allow this. Rome tried to destroy the Christians as enemies of the social order and not as adepts of a new faith.

It was remarked that this viewpoint had been adopted and supported by M. Guignebert, in his work on Tertullian.

M. France.—You are right, Guignebert has shown all that very clearly and in so far as one can definitely say about such uncertain things, I think it's the truth.

So we came back to religious history again. M. France was always ready to talk at length on this subject. We all asked him questions: What about Renan? Loisy?

M. France.—I hope to have the pleasure some day of having you hear a friend of mine, Dr. C. He has a rare insight into such subjects, and an astounding knowledge of them. He'll bring out an admirable work in this field some day, yes, yes, an admirable work, for he knows how to write and he thinks



with vigor. Yes, unless he does nothing at all. Ah! look here, I want you to understand this. C. is conscience itself. He won't write a thing until he's read all there is to read on it. Now you can understand, it will be a long time until he's ready. At present he's collecting books, piling up volumes, his library is overflowing with accumulated publications. That's just what bothers me. I'm afraid that no production is possible under such circumstances.

You were just speaking of M. Renan. Do you know how many volumes Renan had in his library on the problems to which he devoted his life? Why, not even a hundred. That's why he produced and was able to produce a considerable amount of work. His sources, while he is sure of them, don't encumber him. Well chosen texts, the most important monuments of early Christian literature, the patriotic works, that's all. That gave him a sufficient start for the forgivable delusions he suffered from and which he passed on so becomingly to us. His life of Jesus is only a graceful fantasy. I knew Renan very well. His old age was a pleasant comedy. In society, surrounded by pretty women, sunk into a big chair, he resembled a prophet of the Old Testament, who in his last days had become a blackguard and a libertine.

"And what of M. Loisy?"

M. France.—Don't be fooled by him, he's a new Voltaire, with all his wit and his spitefulness. For he is spiteful, very spiteful, like the old priest he really is at bottom. He keeps up an incessant controversy with Salomon Reinbach over any trifling question that comes up. S. Reinbach has only to express an opinion on some text to provoke M. Loisy to take the contrary position, and as it's always easy to find texts to support a thesis, M. Loisy has plenty of them. He certainly gives poor Salomon a great deal of anxiety. Actually, I think he detests him primarily because he is a Jew. Like all



priests, Loisy is very anti-semitic, and you may take my word for it that Loisy has always remained the priest.

I don't quite remember how, in speaking of Jews, we came to Montaigne. Every word of M. France's on the subject of Montaigne was worth recording. He made an unexpected declaration.

M. France.—Was Montaigne a Jew? I think so. I'm convinced of it. His name proves it; his real name was Eyquem. Now that's a common name among the Portuguese Jews, who were very numerous in the sixteenth century at Bordeaux and in Gascony. Eyquem is a Jewish name. The ghetto could not have been more than two or three generations behind him. It would be very easy to give other proofs of his origin, if I wanted to. His cautiousness throughout the course of such a dangerous century as the XVIth, in which religious controversy was very violent, his total yet affected submission to the Catholic Church, his fidelity to its teachings, the extraordinary precautions he took in expressing his ideas, always being careful to put the truths of faith beyond discussion, yes, all that is the characteristic attitude of a son of the persecuted race. I often read the apology of Raymond Sebond, an obscure theologian who certainly wasn't worthy of such celebrity. Montaigne wrote it to put them on the wrong track, to insure his safety, and especially, under the protection of this authority, to enjoy a little liberty himself. Indeed his passion for destruction, his almost morbid desire to undermine all certainties, these are all very characteristic of the Jew. But what a splendid genius. He treated of everything as realities to himself, his intellect comprehended everything, it embraced everything and, in his tower he arrived at a concept and idea of the universe. An Epicurean, he avoided public duties as much as possible, for the Master Epicurus said that the wise man doesn't bother with public

affairs. When they were intrusted to him, he performed them very badly. I even suspect his friendship for La Boëtius. Is it quite genuine? May it not have been a mirror in which he complacently beheld himself adorned with all sorts of virtues he perhaps never possessed? He never loved anyone, he was too exclusively intellectual for that.



Bedroom of Madame France at La Béchellerie



## CHAPTER V

### THE WAR AND THE NEW PROGRAM

**T**HE entrance of Italy into the World War in the spring of 1915 left M. France indifferent and rather discouraged.

M. France.—Still another ally? So much the worse. The more there are, the longer it will go on. Each new intervention means just one more obstacle to peace. Each people will oppose the conclusion of the war before it has realized what it calls its national aspirations and what is really a way to steal a little more from its neighbor, its enemy or its ally. Until this brigandage is over, we cannot stop.

"Master," said Dr. J., a physician in the hospital at Tours, noted for the general barrenness of his conversation, "I don't agree with you."

"I'd think it strange if you did," answered M. France.

Dr. J.—Italy is doing us a great service. Her intervention will finish Austria, with the help of the Russians.

At the very thought of the Russians, M. France grew excited. He began to laugh, stroking his beard.

M. France.—The Russians! It's unbelievable, the way the French persist in their delusions, in spite of the most overwhelming disappointments continually wrought forth by events. Always the same ridiculous hope is revived: the Russians next spring! And the papers keep harping on the same thing. Let it be known once and for all, there's nothing to be hoped for from Russia. She has nothing but men, not a gun, not a cannon, no munitions. We send enormous cargoes of munitions to Archangel. When by chance they don't



go to the bottom and actually arrive, the Russian generals and grand-dukes sell them to the enemy to get money.

Dr. J.'s confidence would not be shaken. He wrote little books to keep up the morale of the French and brought them to M. France with ingratiating dedications. M. France would accept them ceremoniously, thank him, and immediately start to make poor Dr. J. the target of his sarcasm.

M. France.—Ah, Doctor, what's new to-day? Have you still another victory to report? What's happening on the *Carso*? Has the valiant General Cadorna published his meteorological bulletin? It rained on the *Carso*. It snowed on the *Carso*. In spite of a violent snowstorm on the *Carso*. Well, Doctor, we've certainly been having bad weather on the *Carso*. The Italian troops are not in Sardinia yet, but all in good time. One of these days we'll be called upon to go to their aid. Tell me, Doctor, how many metres have been covered in the direction of Goritzia?

The Doctor bore these pleasantries patiently. His patriotic faith would have helped him endure anything.

"Master, there's no reason to despair. Why, only yesterday, your friend Gustave Hervé published an article in *La Guerre Sociale*."

M. France.—Hm! Hervé my friend? Let's be exact: if he was, he certainly is no longer now. Like all neophytes, he goes further than is necessary, overreaches the mark, is swept away by his zeal. His conversion is easily explained, but his enthusiasm is subject to suspicion. I remember a few years ago, just after I had published *Les Dieux ont soif*, I had been to lunch in Paris, in a coöperative restaurant with some friends. I had scarcely entered a vast room full of people when I heard myself hailed.

"Ah, France, that's a pretty state of affairs. I've just read your last book. Ah! what a fine pass you've come to.

You're getting reactionary, you're attacking the Revolution. A foolish course, France, a foolish course."

I can still hear him and see him again with his round doll-like face, his pointed beard, his large, far-sighted eyes under his glasses. Now, isn't it amusing to be treated as a reactionary by Hervé; there's a certain spice in it, especially now. At bottom, he's a great rogue; he knows just what he's doing right now, just as he knew before the war, through all his exaggerations. He was the *enfant terrible* of the party. What consideration did he have for Jaurès, who in every congress had the responsibility of disclaiming and defending him at the same time, who sweated blood and water over these contradictory tasks. What equivocal motions Jaurès must have had to make in the party congress to condemn him without excluding him, to censure him and yet not let him go. Now the champion hob-nailed shoes and gun-shot for the generals has become an intimate at Elysée and dines with Poincaré. And to-day he accuses others of having changed!

The Briand Ministry had just been formed. People hoped that the war would change its course and from a military and diplomatic point of view, take on a more active and vigorous character. "Briand will make peace for us," everyone said to everyone else in the salon of La Bechellerie. The English Robert D., who was a constant visitor, represented Briand as entirely pledged to the idea of making an early peace and putting an end to a war that had lasted only too long.

Robert D.—My friend Ponnosot told me that Briand wanted peace and that he was going to seize the first occasion for concluding it. The Russians are at the end of their resources, and as for the English, with conscription hanging over them, they will prefer peace to military enforcement.

M. France.—But you mustn't believe all that, my friend. Briand is more intelligent than the others, I grant you, but he reasons like the others, he thinks like the others, he will act

like the others, and nothing will be changed. Briand will carry on the war as intensively as far as they want. He'll do nothing for peace. He will give his ear to all the generals who promise him victory for the morrow.

Robert D.—Don't you know that Briand is on bad terms with Joffre and that he wants to replace him? This fat Joffre is a very skilful man, who knows perfectly how to deal with civilians and parliamentarians. All those, even his worst enemies, who went to see him at Chantilly at Headquarters, came back charmed with their reception. Only they didn't know any more afterwards than before. Briand will be managed like the others. Joffre will show him admirable plans for the offensive, spread out large maps, point out the moves of the attack. The first day here, the second day there, the third day and I shall deliver Lille, and that's only a minimum, I can go even faster. The offensive will fail, explanations will be demanded from the generals who will answer: not enough cannons or aëroplanes or munitions. Then we'll begin to wait and prepare all over again. Briand won't change any of this routine, these rites that are as regular as the return of the seasons.

The government is powerless against Joffre, because it helped him go too far. It is now a prisoner of the very glory for which it is responsible. Against all seeming, against all truth and to the detriment of Gallieni and Sarrail, a victory is attributed to him that he did not win, that he could not win. Think of the order of the 25th of August, directing the retreat on the Loire. That's what Joffre wanted.

Robert D.—Poincare still believes in the Russian army as he did in September 1914, after the victory of the Marne. He solemnly announced at that time to an editor of the *Echo de Paris* that the Russians would be in Berlin by Christmas; and he believed it.

M. France.—France believed it too.

The battle of Verdun in the winter of 1916 cast M. France into a profound state of dejection. I saw very little of him at this time, but a tremendous melancholy was evident in him. The accounts he heard of the battle, its violence, its probable length, the losses it cost, made a mournful impression on him. At least once in the course of this battle I heard him protest violently against this useless slaughter, against humanity's frenzy to destroy itself, all for nothing, for ends so vague that no one dared to formulate them.

M. France.—This is a dishonor to the civilized world. The only progress humanity has made now serves to destroy it, to bring about its ruin. What a calamity! And no protests!

He gave voice to his disgust over and over again.

"It won't come to an end, no one wants it to, ourselves no more than the others. . . . France doesn't want peace now that she has grown accustomed to war, she will want to continue it, for the people who are getting rich on it and insist that it continue are only too numerous. Until when? Until victory. But when will that be? Of what does it consist? The defeat of Germany isn't an aim, it is too vague and uncertain for us to know when we have attained it. Meanwhile, the killing goes on and that is a dishonor to humanity.

That same year M. France left for Antibes for the winter months, which were very severe at La Bechellerie, in spite of the logs that always burned in the fireplace. La Bechellerie was neither as large nor as comfortable as it is to-day. M. France went to get the benefit of the sunshine and brightness of the south, in spite of the poor accommodations in the hotels and their abominable food, of which he good-humoredly complained. On leaving he kept saying: "I'm going to fast and give my stomach a rest."

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We saw the Master again with the return of spring. The war was still the principal subject of conversation at La Bechellerie. We began to talk once more about victorious offensives that were to deliver the whole north of France. Need I say that M. France had no faith in them, that the thesis that the forces were evenly balanced was one of his firmest convictions. When the eternal purveyors of confidence, coming from the front or returning, coming from Paris or elsewhere, told of the hopes of army men, of the incomparable value of the progress already made, and the certainty of success, M. France smiled. Sometimes he condescended to reply.

M. France.—I don't believe a word of all that. There's nothing to do, the equilibrium must be broken by some means quite unknown and for that reason capable of assuring success. A weight must be put on one side of the scales; this weight isn't, can't be an offensive. The value and abundance of our munitions is counterbalanced by the value of the enemy's fortifications. It would require some new machine of which we should be the sole possessors—but the inventive spirit of our scientists has never been weaker than since the war—or to change to a new theatre of operations. To invade Holland, violate its neutrality, turn the tables on Germany—there's an idea, a new factor. But nobody would dare do it. Understand that I don't want to see these poor Hollanders invaded, I simply want to show that a brusque change like that would modify the present situation and permit of new solutions. Without any new factor the war can go on for twenty years.

Someone mentioned Salonica: wasn't that a new theatre of operations.

M. France.—Briand is right in going to Salonica, but it's not likely that the solution will take place there. Sarraill was sent there, if not in disgrace, at least not to do anything very



important. He is denied the means of entering upon operations of a very extensive sort, and it's uncertain, moreover, whether they are possible at all. The men have the fever and camp life restricted in its duties and pleasures, wears them out rapidly. General Sarraïl himself leads the life of an oriental prince. He has a court, women, eunuchs and slaves. As is characteristic of a republican general, he has the soul of a despot, and the discipline he enforces is of the worst sort. He allows no advice, no observations, no resistance to his will. His own pleasure is the only rule, his caprice or his desire his unique law. Now isn't that fine for a republican general?

M. France laughed with all his heart at the thought of this general whom all the republicans extolled and who was really the most militaristic of the generals.

M. France.—Why, there are no republican generals. There are only militarists, and as all militarists are alike, Sarraïl is like all the others.

The summer of 1916 was spent in passing judgment on the French and Russian offensives. The Russian offensives and the number of their prisoners threw M. France into merriment.

M. France.—They count the asses, the cats and the dogs they find as prisoners; then they add the civilian populations of the villages they take. That's how they get such formidable figures. And, then, who can take news coming from Russia seriously. As for our offensive, they try to persuade us that it's over a long space of time and for only special results. As a matter of fact, it has failed, it is on its last legs. It won't give us any advantage, the gain of a few kilometres is very dearly bought and means nothing. Peace must be made and soon, as soon as possible. The governments incapable of realizing it must yield to the people who alone can give it to the world.

But even on this point M. France remained sceptical, for if he appeared to have great confidence in the principles to which he was attached, he did not conceal the distrust that the men who represented them inspired in him. Renaudel seemed to him a grotesque and inflated figure who stood in front of his mirror every day to see if he looked like Jaurès. Thomas betrayed the proletariat and made them slaves to paternal mercantilism by silencing them with high salaries. Longuet was a bungler, Cachin an imbecile. Among the syndicalists, Jouhaux was possessed by the Prefecture of Police and the government, Merrheim alone found favor in his eyes; his honesty was irreproachable, but he was powerless.

We often said to M. France:

—Well, who then? The Socialists are either inadequate or afraid. They tremble with fear, they are anxious to protect their constituencies, and the war is a matter of indifference to them. Caillaux. Is he the man to pronounce the required words the country is waiting for?

M. France.—Don't fool yourself, Caillaux is not the man. He too is afraid and becomes lost in contradictory attitudes. At the general Council of Sarthe, he made patriotic and war-like speeches which Leon Daudet would have been glad to call his own; lastly, he gets involved in imprudent and irregular negotiations for which he'll have to pay severely. Through his speeches he loses the confidence of the pacifists; through his suspicious relations, that of the official world. He has a relish for people with damaged characters.

—Do you ever see him? someone asked M. France.

M. France.—No. Mlle. Laprevotte doesn't want to receive him or his wife, she's afraid to.

We appeared puzzled.

M.—Yes, Yes, actually afraid, don't you understand?

And M. France made a motion like the pulling of the trigger of a Browning.

"She says that that sort of thing doesn't go very well in a salon."

—Nobody will be found, said Dr. B., to get us out of this terrible war of which we are all tired. In France there is only one man who can say what everyone is thinking and feeling, record our weariness with massacres, charnel-houses and ruins, give utterance to the great desire for peace and for the reconciliations of men and of peoples. This man, dear Master, is you, there is none but you.

M. France, who was sitting against the fireplace, stroked his forehead, shifted his red cap and remained silent.

## CHAPTER VI

### PATRIOTISM AND SOCIALISM

**A**UTUMN brought us to the threshold of the third winter campaign.

"There's really no reason any more why it should finish," M. France sadly admitted, and his dejection was sincere. The conversations on the war flagged, they seemed devoid of all interest. The Englishman Robert D. stopped making announcements and his friend Ponnosot had no longer made confidences to him. M. France's friends who came to see him learned nothing and seemed discouraged.

One Sunday, during a visit, we saw Senator Jean Depuy, the director of the *Petit Parisien*. He was a large man with short arms, which he waved when he talked. Sunk into an arm-chair, he painted the situation in a very gloomy light; nothing was moving, the war was lasting too long and above all was costing too much. M. Jean Depuy bewailed the loans, the debts contracted, and timidly spoke of peace.

"Let us make peace," he added, "and the sooner the better. There's nothing to be gained in the whole venture." The Senator seemed very anxious and melancholy.

M. France.—I quite agree with you, my dear Senator, but why don't you say all these things in the columns of your newspaper? If the *Petit Parisien* would print everyday things as sensible as those you've just said, the French people would get used to the idea of peace.

M. Jean Depuy stirred in his chair.

"Alas, no, dear Master," he cried, "why, that's impossible, my paper wouldn't sell!"

M. France.—True enough, I never thought of that!

It was perhaps toward the end of 1916 and in the beginning of 1917 that the war was no longer so frequently talked of at La Bechellerie. It had begun to tire the Master, who preferred discussing more general topics with us.

One of the things we talked of was patriotism. M. France spoke with complete liberty.

M. France.—It's a debatable sentiment and it's useless to try to make it an absolute, not subject to any analysis or discussion whatever. It isn't a natural sentiment. It's the product of a certain civilization and of certain social state. To require men to die for an abstract entity—for in the last analysis that's all one's country is—is to set up as an absolute what is only relative. The idea of *patrie* is nothing more than a substitution for national gods and it often happens that these gods are thirsty. By what right do we send millions of men to death for an idea that is only relative and which varies with the social situation of each? Is the *patrie* the same thing for the rich man and the poor man, for the child and the old man? We don't think of all that. The country has become a pitiless goddess to whom we make senseless sacrifices in men and money. Soon we shall have sacrificed as many Frenchmen to regain Alsace-Lorraine as its whole population. Is that sensible, is it reasonable? Where is reason when a country is at war? It becomes eclipsed and disappears. If we had the least bit of common sense left, we'd know that the best way to be patriotic is to use the forces and resources of a country to keep it strong and vigorous. They are squandered without any sense of their value on an adventure whose issue is doubtful and which, even if it does end successfully, will not compensate for the losses we have suffered. Men are insane, and when their frail guide, reason, forsakes them, they are like fools let loose. We are now prey to a sharp attack



of mysticism. Humanity is using up these days riches it will take years to replace, if it can. This war threatens to ruin occidental civilization.

So we were back on the war once more. It hovered like an obsession over our conversations.

It will cause civil war, one of us said, which is even more hateful than foreign war.

M. France protested vigorously.

M. France.—What a big mistake you make. It's strange that we should understand one better than the other. I set forth my opinions on this subject in a short story called, I believe, *Farinota degli Uberti*. Civil war is easily understood, because people know what they're fighting about then. Parties hate one another, men despise one another, and they know what their reasons are. If they kill one another, they have at least the joy, frightful enough to be sure, of seeing a real enemy perish, while in foreign wars they kill adversaries who are strangers to them, whom they have no reason whatever for despising. The hates of peoples for peoples spring from vague and uncertain causes; the interests, the affairs bound up in it make them odious; these hates are factitious, artificially created for the sole profit of detestable castes.

M. France, speaking in this fashion, aroused much opposition. He defended his opinion against all, he seemed to set much store by it, he used every possible argument to prove that if all wars are frightful, civil war is at least comprehensible, while foreign war on the contrary can only be explained by the action of governments, that arouse men who don't know one another or have any desire to inflict injury upon one another.

His hearers, confronted with a problem they had never considered before, gave up the battle.

We frequently returned to the question as to whether M. France ought to talk or write. His friends from Paris came

one after the other to beseech him to publish something on the war. He shrunk from the idea. He only consented to speak in a rather general manner, much in the way he would have written on this formidable subject.

M. France.—One would have to have the enormous laughter of a Rabelais and construct an immense farce. The present situation is analogous to that of the XVIth century after the Reformation. It is impossible to introduce any truth except through farce. Men gone mad won't listen to any voice that may be speaking seriously and telling the truth. Perhaps by joking and making fun of things it would be possible to make some light criticism of the present time. Yes, one would have to have the genius of Rabelais. It would be a fine and worth while thing to write a *Pantagruel*. In it one would be free to say whatever he wanted. Men who won't stand for any criticism of their idols do tolerate jesting. It is forbidden to pass judgment on their follies, but one may ridicule them. They recognize themselves in the satire, but they don't object because they think the author is exaggerating, that he's writing for his own amusement and isn't speaking seriously. It's because people imagine that he's joking that the author is able to publish his real judgments. Rabelais would never have been able to have made such a lively criticism of his period if he had not, with his remarkable imagination, transported everything to an artificial world, created according to his own desire, freedom and genius. He could say everything because he dwelt in a fantasy which seemed outside of the contingencies of the period. If he had expressed in a serious way one tenth of what he said in jest, he would have ended on the block. Taken for a gay and fantastic author, he was left alone. This is the way the war ought to be handled to-day.

—Master, didn't Romain Rolland try to do this?

M. France was not fond of Romain Rolland. This light

and chimerical spirit appealed to him only indifferently. As soon as his name was spoken, the Master showed signs of impatience.

M. France.—Yes, he tried, but having offended the men at the front, succeeded only in concentrating formidable hatreds on himself. It's a strange position to be above the battle. Can one really do it? Aren't we all, whether we like it or not, in the battle. No matter what one does, it is impossible to separate oneself from one's country. It's better to share in its imbecilities than to renounce it. If Jaurès had lived, do you think he would have been in Switzerland writing books for future generations? When you want to serve the cause of peace, you don't first of all go off to live in a neutral country. One's in an awkward position for preaching. Romain Rolland can do nothing but preach, he has the soul of the protestant pastor of a little German village who lives between his piano and his Bible, with an ugly and faithful woman.

Ah! what a strong horror M. France had of Romain Rolland; it appeared in every word he spoke. He confessed that for his part, he had never been able to read *Jean Christophe*; that he had tried; that he had been bored to death. Music was, moreover, save for that of the French masters of the XVIIIth century, somewhat foreign to his nature. German music was closed to him, and the idol of Romain Rolland, Beethoven, made no effect on him. Jean Christophe, with his incurable and vague idealism, was repulsive to him. The truth is that the German soul, with its taste for metaphysical reverie, its transcendentalism, its fluidity, was the very opposite of M. France's genius, formed in the school of antiquity, in the taste of a clear and limpid beauty, of a luminous expression of the mind.

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During the winter of 1916–1917 M. France was away; he went to Antibes and to Saint-Cloud. Mlle. Laprevotte be-



La Béchellerie





gan to grow seriously ill. Her health, which was so dear to M. France and to which he sacrificed so many things, necessitated their going to the *Côte d'Azur* during the winter. Now and then I heard from him during his absence.

I have one letter from him written at the beginning of 1917; I cannot resist the temptation to quote it.

March 13.

DEAR FRIEND:

Let me thank you for your fond interest: our invalid is doing as well as can be expected. The operation was performed in time and most successfully and is being followed by the proper treatment. We feel confident of the future and are beginning once more to smile on life, in so far as one can smile in these terrible days when Europe, as you say, "resembles a lunatic asylum."

Did you realize how true this was? I was merrily informed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the war would last for at least two years more. All the same the great financiers whom I happened to see doubt that it's possible. Meanwhile our ministry is falling to pieces. I shall see Briand Wednesday; this visit will be enjoyable, for Briand is an amiable person. But I am not such a fool as to think it will be instructive. Everybody has become very optimistic again on the subject of Verdun. For my own part, I cannot base my opinion on the despatches. We shall spend a month at Saint-Cloud and then return to La Bechellerie and be very, very glad to see you again.

Yours affectionately,

ANATOLE FRANCE.

By spring he was with us again. He brought with him a young soldier, S., whose acquaintance he had made at Antibes and who was a guest at La Bechellerie for several weeks. Afterwards he disappeared like so many others. But at this time M. France was infatuated with him. He presented him to the group of his intimates.

M. France.—This is S., and, you must know, I'm very fond of him. He has fought, has been wounded. He has ideas

like Barbusse's, he doesn't like the army. Isn't that fine? Oh, you may be sure he doesn't like it.

And indeed S. poured out one antimilitaristic story after another. A millionaire, he preached revolution. This threw M. France into ecstasies. He would go about saying:

"He's charming, isn't he charming?"

We will grant that he was charming.

He was a lad of mediocre intelligence, skilful in making flatteries which he heaped extravagantly upon the Master, who didn't seem to be displeased by them. Wounded in the leg, his permanent place was in the salon of La Bechellerie stretched out on two chairs. He made a great hit telling stories about the fraternization between the French and Germans, how they exchanged tobacco and smoked pipes at the trench borders.

In the spring the Russian Revolution occurred. It aroused a great deal of hope in M. France, for he liked neither czarism nor Russia. We began to comment on this event.

M. France.—I know Russia, I made a trip there before the war. I saw Warsaw and the régime to which Poland was submitted. I remember having witnessed interminable processions of convicts setting out for Siberia. There were men and women, even old men, and all had to go on foot; the children followed their parents, they died on the way, and nobody bothered about them. Escorts of Cossacks convoyed these miserable people. I was told that only a pitiful minority arrived at the destination, those who had most endurance, the others died without any attention by the roadsides. Almost any day processions of these poor wretches could be seen making their way along, marked for exile and death by the police of the czar. You see, when one has seen such sights, as I have, it's impossible not to wish to see tzarism swallowed up in blood.

Someone spoke of Rasputin.

M. France.—This man is the disgrace of this age. The Emperor is a cretin, the Empress is insane. Since the beginning of the war the imperial court has been a prey to mystical delirium. You know of course how Rasputin went about establishing his influence by curing the tzarewitch. He had Wyroubov, a woman completely under his control, placed in the service of the royal child. As soon as he left, Wyroubov put things in the child's food that made him ill. Rasputin was immediately recalled. He came, prayed, and the child grew better, because Wyroubov had stopped her tricks. But the czar and the empress were dazzled by the miraculous power of this man of God. Isn't that amazing?

One of us told the story of the chandelier. Rasputin, who had the whole personnel of the court under his domination, one day thought of giving an uncontrovertible sign of his power. He was in the center of a vast salon, playing with the tzarewitch. Suddenly his face became intense with fear, and he ran to a corner of the room with the child in his arms. At the same instant the chandelier fell and was broken in bits against the ground. Rasputin pretended that a sudden presentiment of fear had warned him of the danger and that he had been able to avoid it through the help of God. The truth of the matter is that he had had the chains of the chandelier cut and that at a given signal someone had let it drop. The emperor and empress had no doubt of the tremendous service he had done them or of the omnipotence of the holy man.

M. France.—It's ridiculous, it shows a credulity beyond all limits. This régime is dead and I'm glad of it, but Russia is fit for no other régime but tyranny. The present efforts to give her a government modeled after western democracies will not succeed. Russia recognizes no government but that of the knout. Actually, in spite of all we have to say about the abuses of czarism, it would never have fallen if England hadn't wanted and permitted it. The real author of the Rus-

sian Revolution is the English ambassador at Petrograd. I believe, Sir J. Buchanan.

We showed our surprise at this statement.

M. France.—Why, it's very plain. Russia didn't want to renounce Constantinople, which we had been foolish enough to promise her, although, as every one knows, we are fighting a just war, free from imperialism and conquest. Lo, it appears that to give Constantinople to Russia is to respect the right of peoples to decide their own fate. We are entirely uncorrupted by imperialism! England didn't want Constantinople to go to Russia; and the Russian government being unwilling to renounce it, she precipitated its collapse by cutting off its resources. For years tzarism had maintained itself only by means of an elaborate police-system. Toward the end it had no way of paying for it except through loans granted by England. England stopped the subsidies and tzarism fell. It's very simple. The new government is in the pay of England and will hasten to say that Russia, faithful to her principles, doesn't want Constantinople. And England will undoubtedly occupy it herself on the first provocation. Only, England should be careful. She has an idea she is able to control the revolutionary force she has set loose. This is a difficult undertaking. It is impossible to control a revolution, especially in Russia, where it will take a social rather than a political form. The Russians have a passion for the absolute and an immoderate desire for destruction. We Frenchmen are at once very naïve and very vain, we always imagine that we are being copied and that the Russians are only trying to imitate the French Revolution. As if it were anything for which we were to be envied. We take Prince Lvov to be a Mirabeau, and Kerensky a Danton. How stupid. There's no possible comparison, the two peoples are dissimilar, and things don't happen the same way twice over. Once let loose, these are not political forms that the



Russians, with their passionate zeal to destroy, are submitting to analysis, these are the very forms themselves of a society they mean to overthrow and demolish. In reality it is Asia flowing back upon Europe. The frontiers of Asia are on the Vistula. Here is one of the first results of this stupid war which is fundamentally but a European civil war. Already, there is no more Russia, and the work of Peter the Great has been destroyed. But who sees all that?

This is not the first time we had heard M. France's uniformly severe criticisms of the French Revolution. I myself felt a keen pleasure in getting his opinions on this important event. This particular evening, having lingered after the other visitors, I came back to the subject.

M. France.—Ah, yes, the Revolution is vastly overrated and fundamentally evil. To it we owe such wars between peoples as these. It gave us Napoleon, which is dreadful. I have been accused of being severe and even unjust toward the great ancestors in *Les Dieux ont soif*. They are wrong. As a matter of fact, I spared them, they were worse. The result of my researches in the history of the Revolution convinced me, with all respect to that imbecile Aulard, that all the revolutionaries were disreputable characters. Well, that condemns their work.

—Master, I said, what about Gamelin, whom did he represent, what revolutionary had you in mind when you created him?

M. France.—That's a very curious point. Gamelin is not a revolutionary but a Dominican without the ear marks. I took an inquisitor, I changed his habit and his period, and the result was Gamelin. When I had made this substitution I was struck with the almost absolute identity of the characters.

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It was certainly at the time of the Ribot and Painlevé



ministries that M. France was most at ease and spoke with the most tranquillity. He seemed to permit himself greater liberty in his conversations and relations.

Robert D., the Englishman, returned, more pacifist than ever, with his friend R. de Marmande, who was planning to publish a pacifist review, that had an ephemeral existence, called "*Les Nations.*" All these people were once more to be seen at La Bechellerie, as well as Rappoport, whom M. France enjoyed so thoroughly.

M. France.—He is the only man capable of passing judgment on the war, since he considers it as an accident without importance to the history of humanity. He looks at all events from the angle of the general universal revolution; with him, everything hinges on that. The war only interests him in so far as it prepares for or obstructs and delays the revolution. He moves in the domain of pure reason and the contingencies of the war do not interest him.

The spring and summer of 1917 were taken up with the preparations for the Conference of Stockholm and the question as to whether or not the famous passports would be granted to the French Socialists. M. France was an advocate of the Conference, not because he had any confidence in the French Socialists—he considered them all incompetent—but because he hoped that it would define the aims of the war.

M. France.—Well, we must be reasonable. The spring offensive has failed, as all have or will have failed; from the military point of view there is no hope. The war is only being prolonged for the profit of the munition-makers who pay the press to keep up enthusiasm. The people are disgusted with it, the governments are powerless, the war goes on because no one knows the magic word that will make it stop. It recalls Anderson's tale—you know the story of the sorcerer who had given a man two magic words, one to make objects move and do the work he had been in the habit of do-

ing himself, the other to make them stop. He found it very amusing to set everything going; it made a frightful uproar, but when he wanted to stop it all, he had forgotten the magic word. We too had the magic word that started the war, but we have forgotten the one we need to stop it.

We began to laugh, the comparison was so perfect.

And, also, one of us said, there is the fact that the front is sick of it all, there have been serious mutinies and it required severe measures to put a stop to them.

M. France.—Yes, I have been told that the mutineers were remarkably well organized, and that those who directed them had had their men empty all their flasks so that it couldn't be said the movement was fomented by drunkards. One particular day there appeared to be only two divisions of cavalry left between the front and Paris who remained faithful. I don't know how true that is. In any case, we must realize that the responsibility for these mutinies falls upon the military administration. They don't give the men the leaves they have promised them, and it should be understood that leave to the soldier means sleep and love, the two sources of forgetfulness. It seems they take a malicious delight in annoying these poor fellows. When they give them a few days' rest in the rear, it is nothing but barrack life all over again. They stupefy them with fatigue duty and exercises; the terrors of trench life seem preferable. Ah, I've said it over and over, only the Republic, a plutocratic and anonymous power, can treat men like this. A king would have pity, but the Republic has no feelings.

—Master, do you mean to say you are not a republican? one of his guests asked.

The Master pulled vigorously at his cap.

—Do you take me for an idiot?

That cast a chill over everyone. We spoke of the repression.

M. France.—It has been severe but if the army had had its way, it would have been terrible. It seems to have been General Petain who reduced it to only what was strictly necessary. We should be grateful to this general, whom I don't know, who was able to combine intelligence with human feeling. From every point of view we are in a difficult situation, so why shouldn't we try Stockholm? One never can tell. What governments cannot do perhaps people can. Oh, don't think I have any too much confidence in the power of the Socialists to save the world. Branting is a bourgeois, Scheideman and Ebert are in the pay of the imperial government; as for our own, it's best just to remember their past.

The Master began to laugh.

M. France.—What is there to fear in Brizon? He'll be more timid than all the rest. It's difficult to understand why Ribot should refuse passports to Socialists who are so cautious. But how, on the other hand, can any act of courage or intelligence be expected of Ribot? He's a wooden head, an Academy dunce. He's afraid of his own shadow; to be sure, it is very large. Besides, he's afraid of displeasing the right, for he is anxious for its votes for the presidency of the Republic.

We all smiled.

M. France.—But yes, he still is a candidate for the presidency. This man is devoured by ambition. All his life he had adopted a policy of hesitation. During the Dreyfus affair he never dared to come out for one side or the other. He took refuge in silence. His wife was a Dreyfusite and she let it be understood that her husband was also one, but that his situation prevented him from talking. So they tried to satisfy everybody.

Let us hope that they do go to Stockholm, for it would be some help even to state why they are fighting. War for

liberty, justice, the right of peoples to decide for themselves, what does all that mean? All this pathos is another step backward. We are fighting for gain, not for entities. It's the Republic that invented the idea of having men killed for words devoid of all meaning. What is the end of all this, where are we going? Men are madmen, cowards or dastards.

So M. France talked freely on about his socialist friends. Several times he spoke with special severity. I was told that he made some confidences on this subject one day in the Tridon bookshop, sometime in 1916, which are worth repeating.

M. France was furious that day against the socialists who were doing nothing to put an end to the war.

M. France.—It is a non-existent party. Renaudel and Thomas are not leaders. They have no ideas, no doctrine, no courage. I think they must be venal; they bungle whatever they touch and pay no attention to issues of real importance. There was no one like Jaurès, and still he was only a rhetorician.

Someone remarked that he should say all that publicly, that he should not allow this party to take shelter behind his authority and genius.

M. France.—What can I do? At my age one hasn't the right to admit that he has made mistakes. If I did, everybody would say I have become decrepit and senile.

If in the privacy of these conversations M. France indulged in severe and well-deserved judgments, in his formal attitude he nevertheless was very conscientiously loyal to his party.

In 1919, in the same bookshop, in the company of two confirmed local communists, he delivered an apology for the Russian Revolution and the Socialists.

"Ah, Master," Robert D., said to him, "you were more severe in your judgment of them during the war. Dare I re-

call to you that in 1916, in this very place, you condemned Renaudel as an imbecile, Thomas as a schemer, Jaurès as a rhetorician?"

M. France.—My child, don't you understand that I was only talking to myself that day?

Hush, he added, indicating his two companions, be quiet, I beg of you, you'll make them suspicious of me.



## CHAPTER VII

### AMERICA AND THE WAR

THE spring and summer of 1918 saw the arrival of the Americans at Tours. The city was full of them and M. France's salon at La Bechellerie overflowed with them. Every Sunday veritable caravans of them came trooping up. Dressed in khaki, wearing tight jackets and flat caps and enormous glasses, they would walk in gravely and slowly, bow to the ground, stare, say nothing, stare, get up, bow again, disappear and be replaced by others who could be seen approaching through the salon window and who acted in exactly the same way.

"They come to see me as if I were a monument, after the Cathedral and before Charlemagne's Tower. I'm one of the sights of the city," said M. France, who was at first very much amused by these visits.

Mlle. Laprevotte didn't conceal her feelings about these Americans, whom she considered ugly, disagreeable and stupid. The truth is that the specimens we saw at La Bechellerie were not very enticing.

They seemed to have the brains of a child in the body of a giant; even their laughter was like a baby's and made a singular contrast with their stature and age.

I shall never forget the arrival of President Roosevelt's son, a blond and rosy giant accompanied by a very tiny woman as blond and rosy as himself. Both of them stood in the center of the salon.

"Oh! M. France, *je suis venu pour vo voar.*"

—Delighted, answered M. France, I am delighted, it's very,

very nice of you, really very nice, isn't it very nice, said M. France, turning to Mlle. Laprevotte.

The latter, who was beginning to feel the effects of a very grave complaint and whose mind and tongue were often at odds, answered;

—*Voui, voui, c'est, c'est tres gentil.*

But Mr. Roosevelt insisted upon explaining.

"No, *je suis venu pour regarder vo et m'en aller,*" upon which he balanced from foot to foot like one of his ancestors on a cocoa-tree.

M. France.—Ah! to think you have come so far to look at me! Well, then, Monsieur, go ahead, look at me.<sup>1</sup>

He came and stood motionless before him. He even asked him if he should turn around, but M. Roosevelt did not understand.

When Mr. Roosevelt had looked his full, he again nearly fell over himself bowing to say goodby and left accompanied by the blond doll. As soon as they were gone, M. France was seized with a spasm of merriment. Everyone else shared it.

M. France.—They are charming. They're not handsome, they look, how shall I say, a little youngish, that's it, a little youngish, or else it is our civilization that is too old; it's one or the other, but at any rate they don't go very well together. But I'd really like to know what they mean to do here. I haven't the least idea. This new intervention is going to prolong the war, each new ally seems like a new disaster. Each new arrival wants to carry on the war for his own benefit and overlooks prior considerations. One war is begun on top of another. We have had the Balkan war, the Russian, the English, the Italian, and the American. Will this ever come to an end? Of course, it's always on our own ground that the fighting goes on. And now here are the latest champions

<sup>1</sup> Translator's note—This whole scene is based on the distinction between *voir*, to see, and *regarder*, to look at, a distinction Mr. Roosevelt did not seem to understand.

of right, justice and civilization. Nevertheless, they're queer creatures. And to think that the two most intelligent peoples of the world, France and Germany, go on killing the flower of their youth for such barbarians. For, make no mistake, they will be the winners, they will impose upon the world in the treaty of peace, Mr. Wilson's biblical Kantian dreams, all carefully run off on the typewriter. You can just die laughing at them. On the one hand, the Bible, on the other a sample of cotton-cloth, nasty combination of Puritanism and mercantilism.

The Master became indignant.

But good Dr. J., whose stupid confidence led him to accept blindly all the current delusions, thought it his duty to protest.

"You mustn't make fun of them, they will do us a great service, they will put an end to the war and thanks to them we'll carry off the victory."

M. France.—But, Doctor, what was the purpose of their coming?

Dr. J.—Because of the submarine war and in gratitude for what we did for them in the course of their struggle for independence.

M. France.—Ah, la la, Washington and Lafayette, the gratitude of the Americans. Ah, Doctor, you have a beautiful soul and I like you all the better for being so rich in illusions and confidence. But no matter how much I'd like to, I can't follow you upon such a high plane. There must be secret reasons of commercial interest for this intervention about which we know nothing. Some day we shall. How do we know that they haven't come to save Germany in the articles of peace, if we ever get peace? They must have found Europe sufficiently impoverished for them to come here and engage in very profitable enterprises. Europe's art treasures, accumulated by fifteen centuries of work in the course

of a splendid history, are all going to America by the sheer power of money, since in these dismal times, money alone is king. But to attribute a *disinterested* purpose to these people, Doctor, requires such truthfulness as yours, such—how shall I say—credulity, yes, credulity, except that that's not a very satisfactory word. But you understand, don't you? I'm very fond of you, all the same; you're a charming person, of course, but you're too gullible, much too gullible.

On another Sunday there was a whole crowd of American generals. They were very solemn; an officer acted as interpreter. They began a conversation.

The Officer.—These gentlemen were very anxious to see you, to express in person all the admiration they feel for your work and your talent.

M. France.—I'm deeply moved, tell them I'm deeply moved by all this. Tell them also that I have nothing to sell, that I'm not very rich; I don't want them to be laboring under any delusion. And then ask them when the war is going to end.

When the question had been translated for them, a very fat and red general got up and uttered a few words: when . . . Germany. . . . He pointed to the seat of his chair, pretended he was throwing something down on it with violence and then sat down on it resolutely.

The Officer.—The general means *crushed*, when Germany is crushed, when America has sat upon Germany until she's completely subdued.

—Ah, fine, said M. France, getting up from his chair and falling heavily back into it like the general . . . crushed, I understand, I understand perfectly, now. Please thank the general.

He ceremoniously accompanied the American generals to the door of the salon, with all the lofty distinction that gen-

erally characterizes his relations with his guests, closed the door, and said to us, smiling:

“Oh, they’re all right, they’re really not very different from our own. And yet, I think they must be a little more stupid. To what a pass have we come? To think that the fate of the world is in the hands of people like these! Poor France, poor France.”

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Nevertheless, in all this flood of Americans, two succeeded in ingratiating themselves at La Bechellerie. The master grew quite fond of them and did not hesitate to show an extremely kindly regard for them. They became his close friends and were soon entirely at home with him. M. France said: “They have annexed La Bechellerie, it’s their first conquest.” Both of them were Jews, their names were, or rather the names we shall give them, Mortim—and Wasser.

Mortim was very young, the son of a New York banker. He came to France to fight the war for justice at the great Headquarters of the American army behind the lines, at Tours. His task consisted essentially in finding rooms or houses for American officers, and in visiting antiquaries. He was very fond of French women and devoted every hour to them that wasn’t taken up with his work.

Wasser was a tall and handsome lad; his stature, his poise were magnificent. His head was like that on an ancient coin. M. France would look at him affectionately and say: “He is like an ancient, he is as beautiful as Apollo.” And it was true.

Wasser’s military duties also permitted him to spend not a little time visiting La Bechellerie and digging up rare and ancient books, upon which he diligently consulted M. France. Wasser didn’t like women, and his body, apparently free from



desire, seemed to fulfil itself simply by being beautiful.

Mortim had wit, Wasser good looks. So each of them in his own way pleased the Master, to whom both of these qualities meant a great deal.

M. France liked to ask questions of these two Americans in the course of our animated conversations.

M. France.—Come, Mortim, and you, Wasser, you know how fond I am of you, you're likable, both of you, and what's more, intelligent, yes very intelligent . . . well, now, tell me, what was your real purpose in coming here?

—That's simple enough, answered Mortim, we came to liquidate our stocks and kill a few undesirable pirates who are harassing our country. Production having been intense and uninterrupted with us, we had enormous stocks on our hands with which we didn't know what to do. The submarine warfare interfered with commerce, so we entered the war to sell them to our allies. That wasn't such a bad idea. We really had too many convicts and habitual criminals; we'll turn them all into heroes by sending them to the front. Their death will redeem their life and it will be complete compensation for them and for us too. Then we persuaded President Wilson that he was going to play a great rôle and that he would be the arbiter of peace, and he entered the war.

M. France.—Yes, yes, with a Bible and a typewriter. He types notes in which he adapts the Old Testament to the needs of poor old Europe, who made the mistake of forgetting it. And you, Wasser, what's your answer?

Wasser.—Much simpler than Mortim's, Master. America is dry. We came here to drink in peace.

M. France.—Admirable! Wasser, my friend, you're as beautiful as a god and as bright as an angel. You've found the real reason for the American intervention; it's funny, so it must be true, too. Wasser, I like you more and more.

And Wasser took advantage of M. France's enthusiasm by

getting him to fetch this or that book to show him and finally obliging him to inscribe it and give it to him. So after every visit he went off with some specimen. Mlle. Laprevotte looked upon all this with disapproval. Wasser noticed this and tried to appease her.

"I'll bring you some preserves," he'd say, "our commissariat has just received some very fine orange preserves, I recommend them to you, they're marvelous."

M. France.—Now, isn't that nice! He's hoping to bring us some preserves. Come, Mademoiselle, give him a smile.

And Mlle. Laprevotte would smile or not, depending upon her mood, which was changeable.

At other times, Wasser, while the guests crowded around Mlle. Laprevotte as she served cakes at the tea-table, would accidentally stumble into the wastepaper basket. Then he would take it upon himself to pick up the contents conscientiously, in spite of the protests of M. France, who would beg him to let it be. He'd put into his pocket any scrap of paper bearing the Master's handwriting. After several such occurrences he made quite a large collection of autographs out of the débris in the waste paper basket. M. France made rough drafts for many things—a careful dedication, a ticklish letter. It was these rough drafts, generally written on the backs of envelopes, that Wasser so carefully rescued. I was told later that this ingenious American disposed of his inscribed volumes and the choicest of his autographs at Brussels at very favorable terms. I don't know how true this story is.

As for Mortim, he was likewise a realist and wasn't wasting his time. The son of a New York banker, he planned to stay in France after the war to start a bank there. At this particular period he wanted to put *Le Lys Rouge* in motion pictures, turn it into a film that would make a lot of money for him. To this end he was trying to induce M. France to make over to him all the necessary rights and authorizations.

He was very busy trying to found a company and sell shares to the people at La Bechellerie.

"It's an exceptional opportunity," he would explain to each of them in the various parts of the salon. "Just think, what I'm doing is for art and to make the Master's work better known. With the help of the motion pictures we will popularize this work still further and make considerable profit." He distributed prospectuses of the company in formation and tried to arrange meetings.

M. France enjoyed his efforts very much.

M. France.—Mortim is amazing. He has a real genius for business. He's perhaps in too much of a hurry, but still . . . Come, Mlle. Laprevotte, take a few shares from Mortim.

Mlle. Emma remained silent.

M. France.—Ah! my word, Mortim, you'll have some difficulty here. I'm doing all I can for you, but you come after the Russians and they have taken everything. You are too recent allies, you come asking for money when there is no more left. Mlle. Laprevotte had great confidence in the Russians, she gave them her money on the advice of the French government. Now she is against the Russian Revolution because it doesn't pay dividends any more. This experience has made her very cautious.

So Mortim and Wasser carried on the war at Tours in a pleasant way by doing business. M. France for a long time found it amusing to discuss them, then he forgot all about them. Wasser turned up in 1920 for M. France's marriage and, like so many others, disappeared like a shadow on the screen of La Bechellerie.

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Mlle. Laprevotte was very ill in the course of the year 1917, after having undergone a serious operation at Paris. She was in very poor health during the entire summer. We took

pains to keep informed about her. She had doctors in constant attendance. Dr. Y. was especially assiduous. He kept declaring that the invalid was getting along well. The more he said it, the more she despaired, the closer she seemed to death's door. As for M. France, his talk was full of inconsistencies and optimism.

M. France.—She's getting along very well, the doctors assure me that she is cured, that there's no trace left of the grave disease from which she suffered. All she needs now is a radium treatment, and we'll take care of that.

So the summer of 1917 passed. Toward the end of the year the Bolshevik Revolution took place. This event seemed to M. France the dawn of a new era. Things had run their course, the Revolution was at last there, it would spread over the entire world, this would mean the end of the war, the triumph of the world proletariat, the universal reign of peace and justice.

Events scarcely justified M. France's confidence, but nothing, not even experience could shake it. I confess that I have never properly understood the Master's admiration for the Bolsheviks any more than the revolutionary ideas he professed with so much steadfastness the last years of his life. No man was by his nature and his tastes more removed from the populace and its bloody triumphs than the great aristocrat we had the honor of knowing. In the elegance of his manners, the depth and extent of his culture, no man was further from the ideas he had adopted. His brazen adherence to principles his whole life belied gave the impression of a forced attitude maintained not by a sympathetic adherence of the mind but by a persistent act of the will.

M. France was distinction itself, not an affected and cultivated distinction, but, on the contrary, a natural one, coming from within, so simple that one was always at one's ease with him except for the imminent possibility of satire, in which he



was sometimes pitiless. His simplicity was charming and kind, his goodness inexhaustible. Whoever came to him never had anything to complain of in the welcome he gave them.

In his salon, he gave the curious impression of a great aristocrat of the XVIIIth century, surrounded as he was by his pictures, his engravings, his art treasures, his books, with their fine, princely binding. He knew how to play the part. He kept up separate conversations with several people at the same time, so that each of them might very well consider himself the object of a secret preference. Nevertheless this aristocrat went into rhapsodies over dirty and brutal moujiks, saw the souls of heroes in them, wished they had imitators in France, the very ones who would have been the first to consign him to the fate of Brotteaux des Illettes: leave him to pine for past splendors in a miserable attic while awaiting the guillotine.

I was once able to discuss this subject with Mlle. Laprevotte, who confided to me some rather curious things.

"M. France," she said, "hasn't quite as strong a horror of anything as of a popular audience. He is sick when he has to deliver an address at a popular university or in a working-class district. He feels that his harmonious sentences aren't suitable to a public that doesn't appreciate their beauty. Every effort on his part to go to the people is painful and every time he does it he comes back discouraged. At bottom he feels he is very far from them, that there is something artificial in his attitude, but he goes on with it for reasons he's never explained to me. He's well aware of the fact that if there were popular movements he would be the first victim and that is why in *Les Dieux ont soif* he pictured what would become of M. France in a troubled period: he was Brotteaux."

I remarked to Mlle. Laprevotte that no matter how strong the Master's imagination was he could not conceive what the reality would have been like or how he would have acted.



"That's very true," she answered, "but he believes he would be like Brotteaux. No one can say, not even himself."

What, then, were the profound reasons which drove M. France to adopt an attitude so contrary to his whole life, and perhaps to his desires and his most intimate thoughts. It is a problem it is not my place to solve, I merely state it in passing.

I perceive three reasons: his scepticism, his desire to destroy, and his disgust with humanity.

M. France's scepticism is nothing new to us. It was complete and made no exceptions. The world and men seemed alike to him in all times, without change or modification of any sort, eternally culminating in wickedness, hypocrisy and slaughter. This scepticism had destroyed everything else in him except the intelligence which stood apart, subtle and profound, always comprehensive, alive and creative. It guided him in everything, in every domain; the conclusions he arrived at through it translated themselves into a general, universal and definitive scorn. His goodness,—for he was good—his kindness,—for he was kind—partook of this scorn.

The desire to destroy was a passion in him. There was not a single idea, not a single act he had not subjected to pitiless criticism. Even the Socialists, even the Bolshevists were judged by him without indulgence. He always spoke very affectionately of Jaurès, but one day he declared to me:

Jaurès was the grave digger of Socialism. He postponed the coming of the proletariat in France for more than a century. His opportunism betrayed us. By his loyalty to all the ministries of the republican defense he killed the spirit of revolution and violence in France. It is rather the bourgeoisie whose power he consolidated for a century, who ought to erect a statue to him.

In 1922, on the Bolshevists and the Lenine government:

It's no more now than a bourgeois government and ultra-capitalistic government. Private property is rapidly being

reinstated under the form of 99 year concessions. It's a disguised way to restore private property. Only the possessing class has changed. A few years more and Lenine will come to France, get off at the *Bois de Boulogne* station, go to dine at the Elysée, review, pin on decorations, make toasts, contract a loan. Nothing has changed, it's the same thing all over again.

This idea of continual, the constant resurgence, was one of M. France's favorite opinions. The destruction of everything, eternal renaissance, without reason, without purpose, without end, for nothing, because it is so, because it could not be otherwise—this is the familiar idea that united M. France to the race of which Ecclesiastes came and for which he showed such a constant and unwavering sympathy. M. France loved Israel deeply; perhaps because he found in it a few of his most confirmed tastes. The children of Israel have on their side loved him equally and monopolized him because they found in the depths of his spirit a reflection of the soul of the prophets, the same maledictions and bewailing, the same lamentations over the injustices of men, the loathing of things as they are, the same old dream forever disappointed, yet undefeated, of an era of justice and fraternity in which he didn't believe. By his gloominess, his hopes, his illusions, M. France served the race that for centuries has been trailing its disenchanted dream across the world.

Indeed, there was something profound and magnificent in his aversion to humanity, and he let no chance to reaffirm it go by. The war hadn't accentuated this aversion, which was definitive, but had given it ground for fresh manifestations. These people, going on killing one another all those years, seemed hateful and stupid to him. He had greeted the Russian Revolution of 1917 with joy, but he hastened to point out that this revolution was only pacifist in appearance, that it was fundamentally militaristic and war-like. Like the

French Revolution it was naturally drunk with proselytism and expansion.

These are, in a very superficial way, the three ideas which seem to me to have influenced M. France and been the cause of the extreme ideas he constantly expressed and yet revised as much as he could to fit the tendencies of his character.

Yet it is from M. France that I got most effective lessons in anti-democracy. He despised the French Revolution and everything that proceeded from it. M. France clearly perceived the source of the ills with which we are mortally beset, and I'm not sure but that this great mind didn't accept the extreme consequences of vicious principles out of regret for a past to which it seemed impossible to return.

With him, we were always tossed about in contradictions. He would express one idea, then resign it, destroy it.

Invariably when we commented on the Bolshevist Revolution in the course of our visits, the Master would give it his full and complete approbation.

M. France.—You must realize that they want peace; that excuses everything. They are going to make the gesture the world is waiting for. These recourses would be applauded, they are making separate peace contrary to the pact of London; and they are right. Who doesn't know that the pact of London was invented at the beginning of the war by England to keep all her allies in sight in the course of the negotiations, to see that no one escaped her vigilance. She swore to make war down to the last ally.

As the salon was at last cleared of the inevitable Americans, M. France, who was extremely bored by these foreigners, began to speak his mind.

M. France.—How very inconsistent men are, how unreasonable in their conduct. Just look to what an extreme the sentiment of patriotism has brought them. Under the pretext of saving France, they are putting a finish to her. They

are killing her children and replacing them with foreigners. Under the pretext of alliance, the country is being opened to them. There are no more Frenchmen but swarms of Americans. In every French family, there is now an American. The son or the husband has lost his life or is risking it, but the unknown foreigner has taken his place. On Sunday you see the American going out with his French family. He takes the children's hands, caresses the mother, when she's passable, or the daughter, if the mother is too old. Everybody considers it all right and very natural. Is the final consequence of patriotism to kill the natives and throw open the doors to foreigners? A fusion of races is thus being encouraged that no one could have foreseen. The Germans are repopulating the North, the English Normandy, the negroes and Arabs the South, the Americans the rest. Is this the way France is going to be saved? I must confess it seems strange.

—Master, said Dr. B., doesn't it strike you that in life men always seem to defeat their own desires and ends?

M. France.—That's infinitely true, a sort of fatality seems to hang over men and make them lose their heads. They want to save their country and they ruin it; they want to save their race, and they corrupt it, and when by chance, a man who has kept his senses tries to bring them to reason he's looked on as a madman. Think of the poor Pope who recently said such excellent things. His followers treated him severely, and his righteous words fell into silence.

## CHAPTER VIII

ANATOLE FRANCE ON THE INTELLIGENCE,  
IDLENESS AND BEAUTY

**A**NATOLE FRANCE during and after the war was fond of going to the bookseller Tridon in Tours, *Rue Nationale*. He was beloved of all.

He used to sit down in a corner at the back of the shop on a high chair that resembled a tripod. At one side there was a long counter on which his listeners sat. Many people used to frequent Tridon's shop during the war. We saw Courte-line and Mme. Courteline there, Lucien Guitry and his delightful wife, Jeanne Desclos, now divorced, and many others. All the guests of La Bechellerie, Frenchmen and foreigners, Englishmen, Americans and Russians, came to Tridon's shop escorting M. France, who used to sit there talking about everything in the world, while the old red automobile waited at the door.

M. France sat on this old and very high chair, with his cane between his legs. He would brandish his shell-rimmed glasses in his hand, put them on to look at some book, take them off to answer an argument, pick up books, look through them and close them again. How many conversations I have heard in this way, my legs hanging over the famous counter covered with green moleskin! How many opinions expressed, how many points of view examined, discussed, rejected in my presence. M. France spent hour after hour talking in the shop.

Out of all these talks I shall attempt to choose the most memorable.



It is there that I heard M. France express his ideas on the intelligence, idleness and beauty.

M. France.—The intelligence is a calamity. It is the most wicked gift that the demiurge could have bestowed upon the inhabitants of our planet. It only makes us unhappy, for it is above everything, comprehension. But to understand is to wish to be unhappy; it is, indeed, to be aware of many new ways of suffering. This comprehensive intelligence has limits which are very rapidly reached. One soon comes to realize that even if they were indefinitely withdrawn the mystery that troubles us would still remain unsolved. So one continues to bear the weight of intellectual curiosity without advantage or profit, inspired with a curiosity always alert and always unsatisfied. In the difficult relations one has with fellow beings the intelligence is neither a blessing nor a profit. As it is not very widespread, it is an object of envy, of fear or of contempt. It makes those who are endowed with it unlike others in their ideas and the expression they give to them. In this way he becomes an object of suspicion and hate. The best thing is to be stupid, quite stupid, which doesn't, however, exclude cleverness: for one can be stupid and have cleverness at the same time; in fact this is generally the case. With nothing more than cleverness one gets along very well, one has the esteem of his contemporaries which is, it is true, a small matter. Perhaps after all it is best to be intelligent, but one runs the risk of passing for a madman.

We aggravate our griefs and our sufferings by meditation and reflection, and in this way suffer twice, from the reality of our grief and from the image which our intelligence makes of it. I myself have spent a large part of my life in doubling my grief in this way. But since I have grown old I have been content to suffer just once; beyond that I don't bother myself.

Toil is against nature, and the Bible is right. The old

oriental fable which wiled away the pleasures and the griefs of the Nomads of Asia Minor understood the painful character of toil. Thou shalt earn thy bread. . . . It is truer than ever, for one needs more and more sweat and bread is less and less good. Idleness alone is divine. It has been sung by the poets. It is the creator of happy dreams and voluptuous thoughts. In our democracies, in which we are carried away by the fever of gain, idleness becomes more and more impossible. Soon it will disappear and with it will go all the lovely things that once gave us pleasure. We no longer know how to be idle. Without Mme. Armand, I never should have done anything. I always had to be driven to work. A sheet of blank paper makes me dizzy.

—Would you have been any happier, someone asked him, if you hadn't worked.

—I really don't know, he added, maliciously, pointing to his friend L. K. who was beside him, but I know a publishing house that would have lost by it.

With this joke the master went off gaily.

In the course of another conversation he spoke to us of beauty and love.

M. France.—The concrete form of beauty is the beautiful body of woman. Prudhon better than any other pointed out its charms. There is nothing prettier than a woman's back. It is the essential and charming part of a woman's body. That's all there is in a woman besides a negation. I have always liked women very much and I confess that in my youth I preferred quantity to quality. I like all of them, but I have a special preference for shop girls. I like them for their fresh and pretty toilettes, and also for the ingenuity of their hearts. I was full of ardor. Heavens, how good it all was.

But now, he confided to me in a whisper, I have renounced all that. The last time, I was quite ill.

I had an idea that M. France hadn't said the last word,

and that a certain lady, as pretty as she was desirable, the Countess D., whom I saw at La Bechellerie, knew something of the matter.

Sure enough, a short time later, the Master fell ill at Versailles.

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M. France was passionately fond of books, of moving them about and touching them.

Once he went to Tridon's and asked for *l'Astronomie* of Flammarion.

—Is it you, my dear Master, who want to devote yourself to astronomy?

M. France.—Oh, no. Not on your life. But just think of it, Mlle. Laprevotte wants in the worst way to know what's in the sky and where the stars are. It's an extravagant idea, but she must be satisfied.

So you can picture M. France seated at the bedside of Mlle. Laprevotte in winter evenings reading her *l'Astronomie* of Flammarion.

M. France went from shelf to shelf, taking out a book and putting it back. In this way I was able to gather his opinions of many of them.

M. France.—You mustn't think that Bourget is entirely without talent, far from that. I don't say with Mirbeau that I once knew an intelligent Bourget, but that he is dead now. No, Bourget is very intelligent and continues to be so. I have been told that he has a very sensible understanding of our present situation. Only, like all of us, he is swept off his feet by an idea. He said, and it is not so badly put, that there were only four centers of resistance to the world revolution; the House of Lords, the Vatican and the Institute of France and the great German staff. Think of the patriotism he must have to wish for the victory of a country which, ac-

according to his principles and his studies, ought to be defeated. In spite of all he wants the victory of the armies of the Republic, which represent misrule, over the armies of order and discipline. He is caught between his principles and his patriotism. If Germany is victorious, it means the triumph of his ideas; if she is beaten it means their ruin. In every respect and no matter how the war ends he is affected, but it is certain that he prefers to be so in his principles. This position is not without a certain greatness. As he had foresight, in 1917 he expressed his opinion in the medical language of which he is so fond. "France is attacked with double hemorrhage." Words that are terrible but true.

From Bourget we went on to the editor Pelletan, a book of whose he was handling; for the conversations went from here to there according to the volumes we came across.

M. France.—What a man and what an artist Pelletan was! He had a way of speaking all his own. When he was preparing a work he had a habit of saying, "I am constructing" a book. And indeed that is just the right word. Nothing was left to chance. He foresaw everything. Not a detail escaped him, or seemed negligible. Even letters of words were important to him. He submitted them to the severest examination. If they were imperfect he rewrote them. He didn't like them either too severe or too large. A book took him years, but when it came from the press it was an admirable thing. He understood that a book to be really beautiful must be rare, and that abundant production kills beauty. Singular contradiction in this democrat who thus showed himself a finished aristocrat. One must not be afraid of contradictions in life. They embellish it and give it its value. His death was worthy of his life. This great artist knew how to die with a firm soul. Suffering from an incurable disease prolonged by a dreadful operation, in his last hours he recalled

Marcus Aurelius, this tenderly beloved master. He went towards the unknown with serenity.

The Master paused, his mind seemed to withdraw within itself and reflect. He didn't like the thought of death, although it was always present in his mind. The idea of disappearance was a tender and disagreeable subject to him. I don't think he was resigned to it, except by an effort of the will.

. . . . .

He got into the red automobile and set out to visit the antiquarians. He engaged in other conversations with them, for he was a tireless and charming talker.

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Whenever I saw the red automobile before the door of Tridon's shop I always went in, drawn by a curiosity that a long acquaintance never wore out. One day I was looking over a volume of Bergson. He touched me on the shoulder:

"What are you reading there?"

—Bergson, my dear Master, what do you think of him?

—This spiritualistic Jew is incomprehensible to me. He interprets everything in terms of the mechanism of our spirits. He scorned reason. His intuition is a source of error.

I protested.

—You too have been corrupted by this tempter. I pity you, but I don't forgive you. Do you want to become unreasonable and senseless?

I hastened to pass on to another subject. He provided one himself by picking up his book, the *Genie Latin*.

M. France.—There is a book that gave me a great deal of worry. When I was young I had made an agreement with Lemarre to write a history of France. You know of course my opinion of historians. Not wishing to imitate my pre-



decessors I paid no attention to the agreement. Years went by; I forgot all about it, but Lemarre didn't. One day he demanded the execution of my promise. I was very much embarrassed and I refused. Lemarre brought a law suit against me, which was a misfortune. I entrusted it to Poincaré, which was a disaster. Finally we made a compromise and the result was the *Genie Latin*.

Apropos of a volume of Nohac's.

M. France.—Now there is an excellent author of whom I am very fond. He is a Renaissance humanist strayed into our perverse century. He understood and loved Petrarch and Italy. He spoke of them divinely.

—Why isn't he a member of the Academy?

M. France.—He will be one, but he has a beastly temper. This sage is an irascible and disagreeable man. He hasn't—and it's to his credit—the adaptability befitting a candidate. In the course of his visits to the Academy he makes as many enemies as there are Academicians. That's going too far. Since the Academy in those days wasn't like a barracks in which one obeys orders, each Academician had a certain independence, Nohac had to win them one by one and he wasn't equal to it. And yet Nohac is a delightful person. He knows Versailles so admirably, and Versailles is the marvel, the splendor of the French genius.

—Ah, interrupted the royalist G., you recognize then the merit and value of ancient France and the Monarchy.

M. France.—Have I ever denied it? But it's a long way from that to admiring your friends of the *Action Française*, and you will never persuade me to. Maurras, whose acquaintance I have made, has a broad and fine intelligence. He is one of those rare people who still know how to write French. For our language like everything else is going to ruin and becoming corrupted. I like him but he is a disciple who turned out badly. What principally characterizes him I

think is the spirit of domination. He has a terrible ambition, not for himself certainly, for he is nothing but a mind, but for his ideas. He is a man to be feared; he partakes of the absolute. He had been treated as a sophist, but that's a mistake. He reasons with a grandeur, with an incomprehensible magnificence. Only his system is false. He works himself up over a corpse. As for Leon Daudet, now there is a detestible partisan.

Here is an example of it. You know all Leon Daudet says about Zola, that he calls him the great fecal. Well, when Alphonse Daudet died, Zola was anxious to be present at the funeral as a pallbearer. It was at the beginning of the Dreyfus affair and Zola, whose rôle was known, was hooted for hours by the crowd as they passed through Paris. I think that Zola paid an homage to Alphonse Daudet that day that his son Leon should not have forgotten. He acted very badly.

Very badly, very badly, repeated M. France with emphasis.

M. Courteline.—But what talent he has, he's just chock full of it. What verve, what truculence, what good humor and what an appetite. Ah, my dear master, did you ever see Leon Daudet eat? He is magnificent! His appetite is tremendous.

The Master began to laugh but D., the royalist, answered: —Nevertheless you will certainly dine some time soon at Mme. Alphonse Daudet's. You will perhaps meet Leon Daudet there who is off on a vacation now. My dear Master, what will you do?

M. France.—My child, you know that I don't carry my political opinions out into the world.

The question of a possible return of the past started a long discussion on progress in which Courteline was sublime, enthusiastic, generous, obstinate and the Master still more ob-

stinate, blowing on all Courteline's fine ideas and putting them out one by one.

Do you deny, my dear Master, cried Courteline, the existence of progress in humanity?

M. France.—I deny everything in advance.

M. Courteline.—Why that's mad. Doesn't everything show a continuous progress toward the higher life and a superior existence? Don't we have various conveniences that our fathers knew nothing of, electricity, railroads, automobiles, airplanes, all these things that overturn our ordinary habits of life. Will you deny all the progress realized since the Greeks and the Romans? Don't you think life is any better now?

M. France.—It's worse. I don't deny all the progress you speak of, but I call your attention to the fact that it was realized only in the material realm and that it did not improve life. It's just as it was in the time of Pericles and really even less fine and attractive. The art of killing has made remarkable progress. The dominant religion has grown dull and the courtesans of our time are less expert in the game of love than those of antiquity. We have given up agreeable advantages and have only gained improvements most of which are unbearable or useless. No, there is no progress.

Thundering, Courteline began his demonstration all over again, but he had lost all his eloquence. M. France was skilful in finding definitive arguments with which to put an end to discussion.

M. France.—My dear friend, all our trouble comes from using the word progress in the strangely false sense of the XVIIIth century writers and the encyclopedists. They gave to the word progress the sense of a spasmodic yet unrestrainable development. The XVIIth century didn't use this particular meaning. They said progress went backward as well as forward. Progress means movement. One can progress

in various ways. It took the ridiculous optimism of the XVIIIth century to give it the meaning of a constant improvement in humanity which did not exist. Humanity does not change.

Courteline still opposed him.

M. France calmed him: "Come and have tea."

And he pulled Mme. France and Mme. Courteline, who had just arrived, along with him. We crossed *rue Nationale*. Courteline, whose mind leaped from subject to subject with infinite rapidity, had taken M. France's arm and was speaking to him of old age.

How sad it is to grow old, my dear Master, how sad. It goes on every day a little more than yesterday, a little less than tomorrow, and the day when there won't be even that will be still worse. Think of it, my dear Master, old age isn't even shown sufficient respect. We are labeled with uncivil epithets, we are treated as honorable and respectable old men.

Standing on the edge of the sidewalk before Potin's patisserie interfering with traffic, Courteline exclaimed in a loud and shrill voice:

I'll be damned if I want to be honorable or respectable. Let them say anything they like of me, that I'm a drunkard, a tippler, that I spend my time playing cards, anything, but not that I'm honorable, not that I'm honorable.

—You can take my word for it, added M. France, dragging him along, that I am not delighted with the idea either.

And they went in to eat cakes.

## CHAPTER IX

### ANATOLE FRANCE AND SPIRITUALISM

LIFE after death, the immortality of the soul and spiritualism were subjects that often preoccupied M. France. Old epicurean that he was, he refused to believe in any personal survival. When I gave him the details of the sudden death of M. le Comte de C., who had been in the habit of coming to our Sunday meetings at La Bechellerie he repeated his views on this important question, which is one of the rare ones on which I found him somewhat positive.

M. France.—But there is no life after death, there can't be. Death ends everything. It's all over then. All we can do is to resign ourselves to it. Why then should we want to survive? Life has been for most human beings without charm, and yet nobody likes to leave it. In this life we only hope for a better one. Can it be any better if it is the same person who makes it? We don't know how to resign ourselves to what really awaits us: repose, nothingness. And yet, it is quite simple and fundamentally desirable. But no, men like to hope against all hope, and women are especially insatiable on this point. I have been rereading these days Cicero's *De Senectute*, and I admire how good and comforting his conception of death is: if there is nothing, it is wrong to trouble oneself about it. If there is a God he can set apart for us after the miseries of life, only an eternity of happiness. This was a wise and reasonable idea. We had to wait for the Christian God to go to the malevolent extreme of judging the miseries of life insufficient and reserving still more for the



other life. This God is wicked. You know from whom he comes. His father is a disagreeable and unaccommodating old Jew, and the son, although he is a little better than he, takes after him. How stupid to imagine an existence in the other world full of grief and suffering. Isn't this one bad enough?

So M. France scoffed at men's hopes for a survival of personality, his pleasantries often recalling Voltaire. He refused to believe in it but he liked to discuss it, and to tell stories that had any bearing on it.

M. France.—I remember the days that followed my mother's death. She loved me dearly and I cherished a great tenderness for her. Her death plunged me into sorrow and made me accessible to all the hallucinations common to an upset and grieved spirit. My mother used to wear white stockings and her dress was short enough to show them between her shoes and the hem of her gown. Well, a few days after her death I was lying in bed unable to sleep. My bed faced a door which didn't quite meet the floor and allowed a few rays of light from the adjoining room to shine through. At a certain moment as I was looking at this door I perceived two dancing rays separated by a cone of shadow. I seemed to be seeing again my mother's white stockings. This image gave rise to other impressions. I thought I heard her voice, her call and even the familiar noise she used to make in her room when she went about her domestic tasks. The impression was so vivid that I answered her and jumped up quickly. It was only when I got up that I understood the origin and cause of my error. But for a whole second I really believed that my mother had come back, that she was calling me and was about to appear. The power of memory and the weakness of our minds are so great that mental delusions are subject to beget the most astonishing results in us. If reason didn't intervene think to what extremes we would go.

—Do you believe in spiritualism, my dear Master, in the apparition or reapparition of spirits?

M. France.—I must confess that I have no belief in it whatever. And yet I have made every attempt to understand it, I assure you. I have gone to many séances, I have been in association with famous mediums, and I have seen them at work. I have never observed anything interesting, serious, or beyond the ordinary limits of our reason. Nothing—no, nothing. Yet, I have been admitted into the most exclusive spiritualistic circles. There was one which met at the Boulevard de Port Royal. I went there regularly. I saw tables moved, but there is nothing remarkable in that, there is always someone who even unconsciously applies the required movement to the table. As to communications with the spirits of the dead, I have never witnessed any that were worth talking about. Haven't you been struck, moreover, with the complete and perfect imbecility of the answers which these various personages give, even the most illustrious which are evoked? You put questions to Napoleon, to Victor Hugo, to Sainte-Beuve and the answers are so platitudinous that you could easily attribute them to your landlady. You'll admit that illustrious men ought to be able to make replies that reveal at least a little of their personality, of what they once were,—but no, nothing. Once, it seemed, we were in communication with Victor Hugo. The most remarkable thing in his answers was that he seemed totally ignorant of his work. *Hernani*, *Ruy Blas*, noble words that meant nothing to him and which he persisted in not recognizing. That is the one remarkable thing I ever saw in the course of these meetings.

—Perhaps, being disembodied, they lost the memory of their earthly existences and of the humble glories that filled their lives.

M. France.—That's possible, but if Hugo forgot his books in the other world, then he is no longer Hugo. You can

even say that he is no longer anything. If one loses his personality in the other world, can you call this survival? For what we are most anxious for is the survival of our particular ego. The finest immortality offered us matters little if it isn't ourselves, with our virtues and our weaknesses, our likes and our dislikes, our desires and our joys, that survive. Thus, the problem of immortality resolves itself into the survival of these selves of ours, which are such insignificant things.

We all began to tell stories about spiritualism and ectoplasms, and Dr. B. spoke of M. Boirac's book—he was rector of the University of Grenoble—*La Psychologie inconnue*, in which many interesting experiments were related.

M. France.—Yes, there are interesting experiments and every scholar knows of them; but are there verified proofs of survival?

Dr. B. was obliged to admit that there wasn't a single proof in Boirac's book and that Boirac realized this himself.

M France.—I don't know Boirac. But I am amused with the ideas of this rector who moves tables. But you see that Boirac himself, who is a spiritualist and has faith, is obliged to recognize that nothing has been proved about life after death. Reason should never lose its authority; the axiom that like knows only like is opposed to all communication with the dead, if by chance they did have some sort of existence. We have no common medium. How, then, is any communication possible? There can't be any between beings who are submitted to the laws of time and space, and those who are free of them. Besides, one has to lend oneself to a great deal of fraud.

Everybody agreed that a great deal of fraud was commonly practised in this realm.

M. France.—Listen to this. One day at a spiritualist meeting, we were asked to squat on the floor around the medium. The lights were put out and we went through the

usual ceremony. There was a very pretty woman beside me. All of a sudden she began to scream as if she had been touched or grazed by a spirit. "I feel something," she said. They hurried to turn on the lights. As soon as they were lit, she laughed and said, "No, I was wrong, it was M. France's leg." You see, one must pay careful attention or else he may be the victim of the worst errors. It certainly was one to mistake my leg for a spirit.

Dr. B., braving our laughter, tried to put the conversation on a more serious plane, but he never succeeded in overcoming M. France's prejudice and repugnance to spiritualism and the idea of life after death. He resisted and found an answer for everything. Nothing could move him from his positivism and his doctrine of negation. He was very bitter against Bergson for having reinstated the immortality of the soul, not with any new arguments, for in his mind there were none, but with old motifs dressed up in scientific fashion. According to M. France, there was no reason why a spirit should survive its body, since no one had ever seen a spirit function without its body. Our good Master remained faithful all his life to materialism, like d'Holbach, Helvetius, and the great minds of the XVIIIth century to whom he was, moreover, so closely related.

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Citizen Rappoport often came to La Bechellerie. As he showed a friendliness towards me which I returned, it will be a pleasure and joy to speak of him, for this very ugly man has a fine mind. True enough, he is not handsome; and he won't hold it against me if I remind him that nature, which was so generous to him in some respects, made him a little too much like an inhabitant of some prehistoric forest. But his ugliness is quite transfigured by his intellect which, one feels, is sparkling. It is too bad that his language seems cluttered, so to



speak, with a thick pulp, for without that Rappoport would have been able to express very beautiful thoughts. But alas, all this magnificence is submerged in an incomprehensible flood of nasal sounds. Awkward in his movements, nevertheless Rappoport pretends to the highest sort of distinction. He kisses ladies' hands, and it is a moment of horror and fear for onlookers when he brings his mouth and his shaggy beard close to a dainty feminine hand. One feels he is about to devour it and that it will never be seen again.

For all his distinction and elegance however, he would not put the cakes that were offered him at tea time on his plate. He preferred to eat them right on the tea-table beside him. Of course they stuck to the mahogany table, and being very awkward in picking them up with his enormous fingers, he only got a few bits while the rest fell back on the table in crumbs. The chocolate cream dropped from his fingers into his beard and from his beard to the table, but the plate remained immaculate. This was Rappoport's way of showing his contempt for the conventions.

He was frightfully dirty, wore a shabby coat, dingy and covered with spots. He kept pulling out of his pockets filthy pamphlets containing his speeches to some socialist or international congress. He would distribute autographed copies of these.

M. France claimed that Mlle. Laprevotte was always afraid of his pulling a bomb some day out of all this rubbish. M. France added that this was not likely to happen since Rappoport wanted to make the world over only by the sole power of thought, and that the only thing one really could be afraid of seeing come out of his pockets were fleas. It is unnecessary to say that Rappoport smelled strongly, but I have no desire to say anything which might hurt his public career. Besides, I'm really fond of him, of his wit, his intelligence, his optimism, his competence. For it is rather clever to be able



to profit from all the advantages of capitalistic society and at the same time proclaim and work for its ruin. Rappoport is the spoilt child of a bourgeoisie upon which he daily casts the solemn maledictions of the ancient prophets.

M. France questioned Rappoport on war, on peace, on everything. For there is nothing Rappoport doesn't know.

Rappoport.—The prolongation of the war will bring about Revolution, so I can't help but favor it. Besides, Germany will not be conquered. She must not be. Her defeat would mean a retrogression of the human spirit. Think of it, the country of Kant, of Fichte, of Schopenhauer.

M. France.—And what about Russia? Now that it is revolutionary, why don't you go back to it?

Rappoport.—My dear Master, how can you think of it? For me to go back to Russia? Why, if I went back, I'd obviously be minister the first three months, but afterwards I'd be hung.

Comrade Rappoport didn't seem enchanted with this prospect. He preferred France, where his wife practised medicine, which permitted him to live in a very agreeable way and collaborate upon the *Journal du Peuple* and *l'Humanité*. To proclaim the end of the bourgeoisie, the coming of the proletariat and the reign of justice, is preferable to the gallows.

At each visit, Rappoport would prophesy and promise peace. He and his friend Basch were directing an important pacifist movement to bring it about. After he left, M. France would make fun of him.

"Basch is mad and Rappoport is his prophet."

Toward the end of the war, in the course of a Gotha raid, Rappoport was arrested in a cellar for having made defeatist statements. He was court-martialed and was condemned. M. France bemoaned the misfortunes of his friend.

M. France.—I shall go to defend him, yes, I shall give evidence in his favor before the Court-martial. I owe him that.

He was a courageous spirit. He must be helped in the struggle he has undertaken for peace against falsehood. I shall say to the Court-martial that he is my friend. I shall say that he has a great and fine soul and that he is innocent. I shall go. I must go.

The trial took place, and M. France did not go . . . which didn't astonish anybody. When Rappoport published the defense that he made before the Court in pamphlet form and sent a copy to M. France, the latter didn't hesitate to laugh at his expense.

M. France.—Is it possible to know so little about one's own time and the judges to whom one is speaking. You don't have to understand the Critique of Pure Reason to be intelligent and to have sense enough to say and do the right thing. This man floats in the clouds, he considers himself a martyr. But martyrs had another attitude and spoke another language. Rappoport as a martyr! How funny it would have been! Still I am glad he wasn't shot.

If he had been in Russia, Lenine wouldn't have been so gentle with him and Rappoport would, without a doubt, be no more than a memory today, someone interposed. Bourgeois justice is full of lenient streaks. It's laughable, even in war time.

M. France made no reply to this observation. A few minutes later he thundered vehemently against the régime of force installed by the Clemenceau ministry.

M. France.—It's the terror. We shall all be submitted to it. The carts are here already. Soon we'll be sacrificed to the forces of falsehood that control the world. Life is sad.

So M. France tried to assume the puce-colored coat of Brotteaux de Illettes. He considered himself in danger, but I am convinced that he never was.

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Let us finish up our account of the amusing Rappoport. To do so we must anticipate a few years. The scene takes place in November 1922, M. France's salon is full of people, the door opens, Rappoport enters dirtier than ever, carrying under his arm a portfolio full of papers. He is accompanied by a young girl with bright, intelligent eyes. It is Mlle. Rappoport. She is much less unprepossessing than her father. M. France hurries to greet them.

—Ah my dear friend, I am so glad to see you. It is so nice of you to have come. What have you to say for yourself and where have you been? I haven't seen you for such a long time.

Rappoport sat down, holding his portfolio on his knees.

—Master, I've just come from Russia.

M. France.—From Russia? You've been to Russia and you came back?

Rappoport.—Yes, I came back. That may seem extraordinary to you, but that's how it is. I saw memorable things, and I returned with a heart full of enthusiasm and hope. What surprises, what miracles, what marvels it was my good fortune to behold!

M. France.—Hope is deceiving and fosters illusions. But I'll be glad to listen to you, Rappoport. Tell me about some of these marvels you've been seeing.

Rappoport.—In France, alas, there are plenty of reasons for being pessimistic, and the recent congress of our party is an example. I nicknamed Boris Souveraine a division general. In Russia however, I was fortunate enough in the course of my three-months trip to see many reassuring things. I discovered three new forces there that I did not expect and that seemed very solid: the conquest of power by the proletariat, the red army and education.

The conquest of power by the proletariat is absolute and it is a thing hitherto unknown in history. This is the first time

it has ever happened, but Bolshevik Russia has realized it. All powers—not only political powers, which don't amount to much, but economic powers—are in the possession of the proletariat. They have in the past sometimes succeeded in gaining political rights but the bourgeoisie had carefully safeguarded economic power. In Russia it is economic power that has been attained. Socialization is as complete as you can imagine. Factories, workshops, certain banks, wealth of all sorts—these are now the property of the organized working class. Isn't that splendid!

M. France.—Of course, of course. . . .

Rappoport.—The Red Army, whose duty it is to ensure this array of powers is a superb and impressive force. The total size is large, the soldiers are well fed, well clothed, full of faith and enthusiasm, the officers well trained and respected. One perceives in the reviews that are frequently held, a disciplined army, dangerous to civil or foreign enemies. It's a grand sight to see these ranks preceded by the Red flag, these military bands playing *l'Internationale*. I was entirely reassured upon the fate of the Revolution. It is an accomplished fact. Moreover, the Revolution goes on with its immense task of organization through education. There is still another superb work going on. There are schools, laboratories and universities everywhere. An entire people is being instructed.

M. France.—That's all very fine, but all that you are telling me sounds like the régime of democratic bourgeoisie, such as you find everywhere.

Rappoport.—It has nothing in common with it, since it is the proletariat that is everything. It is quite different. Complete order reigns, all the delinquents and the thieves and the highwaymen have been made harmless. There are no more ill doers, no more drunkards. The streets of Moscow, of Petrograd, are safer than many streets in Paris. I've



walked through Moscow at midnight perfectly secure. It is a well organized society that lacks nothing, not even its poor. The monetary unit is what is called a *citron* or a million rubles. You mustn't think that life there is so different from life elsewhere. Petty capitalism has been reëstablished. It is only large scale capitalism that has disappeared. You can still have tea and cakes at Petrograd, you only need to lay out three or four hundred *citrons*. The régime is sound and everybody is free, except of course the nobles, the bourgeoisie, the rich, the prostitutes, the priests, the officers and the supporters of the old régime. All these are not permitted to vote. They have no rights. Only workingmen are active citizens and have the right to vote. The others have the right to silence. You see, it is an admirably organized society. As is proper, there is full and complete liberty to those who belong to the dominant party, but none for all the others.

M. France.—Certainly, that's the mark of a highly civilized state. Did you see Lenine?

Rappoport.—No, but it was only out of pure discretion on my part. He is completely cured and he has resumed his overwhelming task. The amount of work this man does is prodigious. All by himself he makes decisions, keeps watch over everything, organizes everything. It would be a shame to take this remarkable man from his work for a single moment.

M. France.—Lazare Weiler whom I saw a few days ago, and who has just come back from Russia told me the same thing. In his opinion Lenine has a genius for organization, and is the greatest man Russia has produced since Peter the Great.

Rappoport.—Yes, he is a very great man, and do you know my dear Master, he admires you very much. They put up a statue to you in Moscow as well as to Jaures. In the three months of my stay there, I delivered more than sixty



lectures. I traveled in a drawing room and stopped at the different stations along the way. The train would slow down and I would speak to the people from the platform of the train. The ovations I received are beyond description. At Kronstadt, I was received by the officers of the Red Army in full uniform. I passed before the troops, they played the Internationale, I saluted to Red flags that were lowered for me. It was superb.

M. France.—Hm! Isn't that rather like Felix Faure's reception, as you tell it?

Rappoport evidently didn't hear M. France.

Rappoport.—It was a dockman who was delegated to address me in the name of his comrades and of the local soviet. He spoke magnificently of the Revolution of 1789, of the Paris Commune and of Karl Marx. I was astonished to find so much eloquence and knowledge in a simple man. I said as much to him and he replied that it wasn't unusual and that educated comrades were numerous. That is the marvel of it, after only four years of revolutionary régime. Doesn't it seem beyond belief? The Revolution only changed the privileged persons, but it changed them from top to bottom. The workers declare themselves dissatisfied with their material situation because it is obviously bad. Life is strenuous and difficult, food is a problem that has to be solved every day; but they also say that they are happy in this régime because it is theirs and they are masters in it. Never before has a people pressed the spirit of sacrifice so far for an idea. The Russian people enlarged the limits of human suffering for an idealistic purpose. It offered itself as a victim, as a holocaust for its ideal, which is world revolution. It hopes for it, awaits it; and it will come. My dear Master, we must look forward to it with confidence. It will be a blessing for us and for all humanity.

M. France.—I want it as much as you do. Amen.

The Master didn't seem to be convinced, but Rappoport's words had aroused the enthusiasm of the others. A lady decked with pearls and diamonds called for the near advent of French Bolshevism in decisive terms. Rappoport began to distribute an autographed pamphlet containing his speeches, particularly the *French Communist Party to the Executive Committee of Moscow* and the *Summary of Communism*. Seated at M. France's table, Rappoport went on dedicating his pamphlets without a minute's rest. All hands were stretched out to him, the women patting his dirty coat, leaning over this man with his unkempt beard, archly whispering their requests.

"M. Rappoport, now please don't forget me. I must have the *Summary of Communism*. It will be of great interest to me. I beg of you."

Rappoport, gracious, in the best of spirits, wore a smile that revealed his immense mouth and his yellow teeth. To these lovely persons, all of whom belonged to the sacrificed bourgeoisie, he distributed tracts containing incendiary theories which would one day send them to be massacred. It was a charming sight, exquisite, the last word in dilettantism. As I sat there in my chair, a memory came to me. There was one other time in our history when beautiful women flattered a dangerous maniac, who certainly was a better writer than Rappoport and who also foretold to a society weary of traditional institutions the Sovereignty of the people, universal peace and happiness in a state of peaceful and natural equality. His name was Jean Jacques Rousseau. Suddenly the guillotine appeared before my eyes.

I repeated to myself a sentence I knew by heart: "Robespierre was an optimist who believed in virtue. Statesmen of this temperament do the most harm. If one wishes to govern men, one must not lose sight of the fact that they are mischievous monkeys. This is the only condition upon which one

can be a humane and benevolent politician. The folly of the Revolution was its desire to establish virtue on the earth. When you want to make men good, wise, free, self-controlled and generous, you are fatally led to want to kill them all. Robespierre believed in virtue: he originated the Terror. Marat believed in justice and he demanded two hundred thousand heads. M. l'Abbé Coignard wouldn't have signed a line of the Declaration of the Rights of Man because of the excessively iniquitous distinction which is established in it between man and gorilla." <sup>1</sup>

My meditations came to an end and at this word I looked up to M. Rappoport.

<sup>1</sup> Les Opinions de M. Jerome Coignard, p. 26 & 27.

## CHAPTER X

### CLEMENCEAU AND CAILLAUX

NOVEMBER 1917 brought the fall of the Painlevé Ministry and the formation of the Clemenceau ministry. M. France was hostile to it from the very beginning and this hostility never flagged. His hate for Clemenceau was extremely vigorous.

Just back from Paris, I went to see M. France and he asked me many questions on what was being said about the new ministry, its possible endurance.

—Some, I said, declare that it's bound to fall very soon, others, on the contrary, claim that being very popular with the Army and the country, in general, it will last until the war is over.

M. France.—He is a very dangerous man, that's all I know. I am afraid of all the harm he is going to do. I got to know him at the time of the Dreyfus affair. I realized then that he had certain good points. He is a strong, a wilful, an energetic man. I felt his singular power at the time of the Affair under the following circumstances, which I like to talk about. One evening at the beginning of the campaign we dined and spent the evening with M. and Mme. Aulnay, who are in close connection with Clemenceau, as you know. He was by that time living on *rue de Franklin*. We left together and took each other home and talked a great deal. We walked along the deserted streets of Paris and I listened to Clemenceau speak with that sharp and fierce eloquence which is so characteristic of him. He set forth the reasons for Captain Dreyfus' innocence, the memorandum, Esterhazy, the

whole thing was gone over in a moment. But upon the obstacles to be overcome before the revision was gained, he was inexhaustible. He enumerated them glibly one after the other. He pointed out the nearly invincible power of error and falsehood, the force of cowardice. He showed that whether dishonest, ignorant, cowardly or skeptical, we would have nearly everybody against us. Finally there was the Army which would never recognize its errors or its faults, which would do everything in its power to cover them up, to disguise them, which would pile up lies to defend itself. He spoke of the innumerable difficulties, asserted that we would triumph over some, but that others would arise in their place. The task was hard, the risk great. Those who love peace, he said, would do well not to join us. I was overwhelmed, wondering if before so many obstacles it would really not be better to renounce the whole business, when, as we were turning a corner at six o'clock in the morning, Clemenceau slapped me on the shoulder and said;

"But in spite of all that, we'll succeed," and left me. Clemenceau's outstanding characteristic is will power. He can inspire confidence, he has this great quality; he really can revive courage when it is low and arouse the will. But these are only passing impressions. Clemenceau's work itself is evil. He never willed anything that was not evil. He is not disinterested. I have in later years grown certain that Clemenceau was paid in the Dreyfus Affair.

—And the others?

M. France.—Vaughan, director of the *Aurore*, was only a paper manufacturer. Of course he was honest. As for Jaurès and Pressense, I swear that they are irreproachable. Their work was fine because they were guided by no personal interest. Zola was great, Bernard Lazare, sublime. As for myself, I don't think I am suspect.

At least one woman did me justice. You know who?



The Empress Eugénie. One day at the critical moment of the Affair I saw her in the salon of the Princess Mathilde. I scarcely dared to greet her fearing her reproaches.

—Monsieur, she said, "You believe in the innocence of Captain Dreyfus. You're right. I know military men myself. I've seen them at close quarters and I believe them capable of anything."

—I was agreeably surprised. She even offered to add her name to ours. I gratefully declined this offer. There were enough difficulties in our way. That would have been insurmountable.

—And Princess Mathilde, what did she think?

M. France.—Nothing, she kept complete silence. She lived in constant fear of expulsion.

These digressions on the Affair and the role that Clemenceau played in it didn't take M. France's mind off the formation of the new ministry.

M. France.—He is a wicked person. At his age, one no longer takes any risks. He has no heart. He will have millions of young men massacred to assure his own glory, for old men are pitiless and hungry for honors. Censorship will be more severe than in the past. Every expression of thought will be forbidden. We will have to pay more attention than ever to what we write and even to what we say. The terror has begun. I'm going to surround myself with complete silence. Prudence is indispensable. We must be cautious, very cautious.

M. France was very cautious. He spent the winter of 1917-1918 in the south at Antibes. Was his correspondence watched or did he only imagine it? The letters that were addressed to him went to a certain Mr. D., who during the whole period was his factotum and confidential secretary. D. assumed mysterious and important airs. He looked as if he bore on his shoulders, which were narrow, the weight of

tremendous secrets. At Paris we had fuller news of him at S's, of whom I've spoken a little in the course of these recollections, where we met M. Moutet, deputy from the Rhone, a friend of the Master. M. France, at this distance, continued to show his distrust of the Clemenceau ministry. He accused it of being in conspiracy with the money and finance sharks and of prolonging the war for their advantage. With the utmost discretion, M. France wrote to his friends of the absolute necessity of making peace.

In March 1918 M. France returned to La Bechellerie. Mlle. Laprevotte was very sick. M. France tried to reassure himself by telling everybody that she was getting better and better. One can imagine the animated conversations we had at La Bechellerie on the events that were taking place. The arrest of Caillaux took precedence over all others. M. France continued to defend him and proclaim his innocence, but pointed out at the same time that he considered him very imprudent and clumsy.

Someone ventured to say to him that Caillaux's imprisonment was a necessity and one of the conditions of victory. M. France replied with vivacity and strong feeling.

M. France.—You don't understand. Caillaux has succumbed to the inexplicable hates which he has somehow aroused against himself. He is the most unpopular politician in France. Moreover, he has done everything to bring this about. The session of the Chamber in which the question of parliamentary immunity was examined, was, I was told, tragic. The duel between these two men, the one speaking in self-defense, the other entrenched in his silence, was not without a certain magnificence. It recalls some of the sessions of the Convention between Danton and Robespierre. It is very much the same sort of thing. And it's good Jacobin tradition to profit from the serious situation of the country to send one's adversaries to the scaffold. It is always the same accu-

sation of being in the service of the enemy and of being a traitor. Robespierre accused Danton. Clemenceau accuses Caillaux, nothing is changed. Clemenceau is a downright Jacobin. He has the character, the hates, the prejudices, the behavior of one, the same fondness for summary executions and even the same conception of patriotism, of this ruinous and catastrophic patriotism which, under the pretext of saving the country, overcomes and ruins it. That is all characteristically Jacobin.

—What will be Caillaux' fate?

M. France.—If it comes to a show down he will be shot. Only he is a tough adversary. He has strong powers of resistance, knows how to defend himself well and is no fool. If he can escape the Council of War, he is saved. If he is brought before the Court-martial he is lost. I wrote to him in prison. I gave him courage and hope. I told him how highly I thought of his intelligence, how I trembled with indignation at the story of his misfortunes, how I hoped he would preserve his energy to defend himself. He replied that his courage was intact, that he would not weaken. I ardently hope this will be the case.

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The period of the long Clemenceau ministry was the one in which M. France seemed most troubled, the most spirited in his comments, the most reserved in his writings. Mlle. Laprevotte frequently confided her anxieties to me during these troubled days.

—M. France continually receives letters threatening death. Every day we find anonymous letters in the mail that either threaten or warn him. The fate of Caillaux awaits you, one wrote, you belong in prison with all bad Frenchmen, and before the Court-martial. You are a defeatist and a traitor. These letters disturb M. France very much, although he tries

not to show it. He is extremely upset and avoids public statements that might give his enemies a hold on him. Moreover, M. France has, because of his ideas and the party to which he belongs, some obligations he cannot disregard under pain of seeming to show a weakness of character unworthy of him.

We tried to reassure Mlle. Laprevotte by persuading her that M. France ran no danger, that nobody would dare attack the man that belonged not only to France but to all civilized humanity.

Our words were not very successful in reassuring Mlle. Laprevotte. Her strong anxieties, aggravated by the disease from which she suffered, gave her a strange turn of mind. She suspected everybody and watched over the Master tyrannically. Visitors were all objects of suspicion, the servants all closely watched. Not even the most humble farm-hand of La Bechellerie was entirely free from unjustified mistrust.

"We live in very painful times," lamented Mlle. Laprevotte. "M. France is in danger, there will never be an end to this war. Oh, how I hate it."

As for the Master, he longed with all his might for peace.

M. France.—This endless war is criminal. The most abominable part of it is that nobody wants to put an end to it, nobody. You can't make me believe that otherwise it wouldn't have been stopped. Emperor Charles offered peace. He is the only reasonable man who has appeared in the course of this war, and nobody listened to him. That might have been a way, at least they could have tried it. Clemenceau treated the Emperor as a case of "bad conscience"; and that was unjust. Emperor Charles sincerely wanted peace, so everybody despised him. Ribot is an old scoundrel for having let such an occasion go by. A king in France surely would have had some pity for our enfeebled and exhausted people.

But democracy is without a heart, as without entrails. Being in the service of the moneyed powers, it is pitiless and inhuman.

—There are the people perhaps.

M. France.—No, the people is a great force without any real power, because it doesn't become incarnate in whoever dares to speak. You saw what happened at Stockholm, it was a decisive blow. You know I have no more illusions about the socialists.

The conversation returned to Caillaux.

M. France.—What a man! How he holds his own against Bouchardon. There is nothing whatever in the brief against him, but of course that doesn't mean that his innocence will be recognized, far from that. A justice that has any respect for itself, doesn't provide for the innocence of the accused, it would be contrary to its rôle and its mission, which is to condemn. Nothing was found in the strong box at Florence to compromise Caillaux. What they did find there were the documents signed by Waldeck-Rousseau, who, at the time of the Fachoda affair, put Clemenceau under surveillance of the police and forbade him to cross the boundaries of the French territory. That's what Clemenceau went to Florence for. Now he is more at ease. They treat Caillaux like a criminal of common law, they submit him to useless vexations. In this suit it is only a case of old hatreds taking vengeance, first, Clemenceau's, who could never stand Caillaux, and also Poincare's. In addition, the quarrels between their wives are involved. "Madame Poincare" loathes "Madame Caillaux." Caillaux must certainly be innocent to be able to resist all that. If there was the least indication of guilt he would be shot. He was put into prison upon his arrival, naked as a worm. In this simple apparel he said to a guard who called him Monsieur: "Call me M. President." His strength of character has not broken down.



The momentous disasters of March 1918 upset M. France all over again.

M. France.—This is where Clemenceau has brought us, to disaster. The Germans were no longer at Noyon; he brought them back. The English are tired, their troops are giving way, it is always the French who arrive to save the situation. We sacrifice ourselves without reserve. A few months ago we saved the Italians from disaster, the Italians detest us more and more after each new service we do them. They will never forgive us for seeing them defeated and humiliated. It will be the same way with the English. If ever we have peace, we'll see how grateful they really are. And now Paris is again threatened, bombarded, and existence in it made horrible. We won't forget March 1918 for a long time. It is the period in which France was most in danger during the whole war. Amiens may be taken at any moment. Clemenceau goes to the front escorted by the solemn René Renoult and repeats, "I am very well satisfied, very well satisfied."

—One must have confidence, asserted Dr. J., who indulged in the most unforgivable stupidities,—our great chiefs will save us.

M. France.—So it is not enough that we overwhelm them with stars and decorations, but we must also shower astounding epithets on them; our great chiefs! Chief is a name that very few deserve and yet you call them great chiefs although they do nothing, know nothing, are capable of nothing. The marshals and generals of the First Empire who contributed to so many victories, won so many battles, defended so many places, we never treated them as great chiefs; but here we are, after four years of war, talking like this about men who are just where they were when they started, who massed their troops in the east when everybody knew that the Germans were coming from the north, who, in the beginning of the war,

went in for romantic offensives in Alsace-Lorraine. It's insane.

The spring of 1918 was thus a very troubled one at La Bechellerie. The Master went through great anxieties. The letters he received from Paris increased the terror he had of seeing France defeated and obliged to accept an unfavorable peace, while in his opinion, such successful terms could have been made after the Marne.

About March or April M. France made a short trip to Paris. The *Noces Corinthiennes* were being played just then at the Comedie Française. He went to a performance during which sirens announced a Gotha raid. He remained in his box, but didn't feel easy.

"You understand, he told us a few days later, it was a very difficult situation. If I'd gone down to the cellar, everybody would have said I was afraid. I couldn't do it. It was very disagreeable to stay behind. I don't like the noise of bombs, and I'm not a hero."

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M. Clemenceau grew more and more rigorous. I've already told how M. France received one summer Sunday, in 1917, a visit from Robert D., the Englishman previously spoken of, accompanied by M. de Marmande. They had both come to discuss the new review *Les Nations*. This review, which was to defend the cause of peace, had an ephemeral existence of a few months. M. France had promised its directors an article which he never gave them. In 1918, M. Robert D. received an expulsion order and went back to England to fight Clemenceau in the columns of the Manchester Guardian.

M. de Marmande took refuge in a complete and unbroken silence. The review disappeared after a few numbers.

M. de Marmande came to tell his sad tale at La Bechel-

lerie. M. France consoled him and pitied poor D., Clemenceau's victim.

M. France.—What will become of poor Robert D. and his family of four charming girls who were here. You recall the oldest, so pretty and frail; another, very slight and tiny, was the fiancée of an English officer who was as tall as she was short. They will all disappear and we won't see them again. But, after all, it is his own fault. I warned him. He staked all his resources on Caillaux, believing in his imminent return. In vain I kept telling him that he was making a big mistake, that Caillaux was nearer the stake than accession to power. He wouldn't believe me and now look what's happened. None of these people have had the least understanding of the war. They've always thought that it was only a slight accident which didn't affect the formerly powerful coteries. Clemenceau upset all that with a fillip.

The winter of 1918 was a gloomy one at La Bechellerie. Visitors ceased coming so frequently. Steinlein, the painter, came to see the Master with his son-in-law and daughter. M. France received him affectionately. He seemed to be really very fond of him. He congratulated him warmly on a drawing he had made representing a woman in mourning and three of her daughters standing by a coffin and bearing the legend: *la Gloire*, an impressive portrayal of grief.

M. France.—There's military glory for you, with its train of mourners and dead. You've put into one picture the real truth about the war and its afflictions. When shall we comprehend the awful tragedy of military glory, what it costs and what it's worth?

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If the winter of 1918 was calm, the spring was on the contrary an exciting one for M. France, and visitors came in great numbers. In May and June, at the time of the great

new offensive on the *Chemin des Dames* which reopened the road to the capital to the Germans, there was a frantic flight from Paris. Among M. France's friends at Paris there was only one slogan:

"Let's go to Tours and see M. France."

One Saturday evening I found in the waiting room of the d'Orsay station a whole crowd of travelers. S., his wife and his dog, G. B. a journalist on the *Echo de Paris* and his mother, M. le Député Moutet and a great many others. They were to spend the Sunday at La Bechellerie. I went myself. What a Sunday, what a gathering! It was one of the liveliest days I was ever privileged to see at La Bechellerie.

M. Lucien Guitry and his wife Jeanne Desclos were already there. In the crowded salon M. France was busy asking questions.

M. France.—Well, tell me, what are you doing with yourself, how is Paris?

A chorus of lamentations arose. The large S. was more verbose than ever.

—Ah, dear Master, everything is lost, the Germans are approaching, Paris may be taken at any moment, everything's going badly, the English fail wherever they are put. Clemenceau is leading us on to ruin, to defeat. We must make peace. Yes, we must make peace without delay. In two weeks it will be too late.

M. France.—Aren't you exaggerating? The press doesn't strike such a disquieting note.

Speaking to G. B.:

M. France.—Your paper is full of hope, Marcel Hutin says that the situation is getting better from day to day.

—Ah, if you're going to believe Marcel Hutin, replied Mme. S., you'll have hope even when there isn't any. He dispenses soothing information on government orders. The

other day, last Thursday, I went to see him at the *Echo de Paris*.

"What," he said to me with surprise, "you here, at such a time? Do you mean to say you haven't left Paris yet? But you must go, you must go without a minute's delay, you can't possibly imagine just how bad things are with us. The Germans may be in Paris in three days, four days, perhaps. I saw Clemenceau and he declared that one can answer for nothing. The government can't leave Paris because if it abandoned it a second time it would deliver it to revolution. Poincaré no longer lives at the Elysée, he sleeps in a different place every night.

M. France.—Fortunately, Hutin doesn't say that in his articles. He doesn't know what to say any more, so he's adopted the idea of acting his own censor, which is the best thing he's ever done. He writes: "Our troops fought valiantly under the command of C. I saw General X. . . . He is full of hope, he said . . .," then follow several lines of dots which he attributes to the censorship. "Yesterday," continued Hutin, "at the headquarters of . . . I was shown an entire plan which consists in . . ." more dots. Hutin thus persuades people that he knows a lot of interesting and encouraging things; although he really knows nothing and is more afraid than the rest, instructions are to inspire hope in spite of everything; so he distributes, sells it, and that's the method he's found for satisfying this desire.

The Master was amused at this imposture, but he wanted more serious information.

M. France.—And the strikes?

M. Moutet.—They're still at the same stage. Citroen is on strike, Renault as well, Clemenceau, who was to set everything right, is capitulating. He summoned Merrheim and asked him to use his influence to put an end to the strike. Nevertheless he called out miners of the younger classes, as-



sembled them at the *Ecole militaire* and sent them to the front in automobile trucks.

M. France.—But there are other strikes at Roanne, at St. Etienne. Helene Brion went to hold pacifist conferences in this region and nobody dared to forbid them. It's from things like that that peace will come. The fate of Russia threatens us. Meanwhile the Parisians are in flight, fearing both war and Revolution. Tours is overrun with people. But I'm grateful that this gives me an opportunity to see you.

His visitors smiled, but seemed embarrassed.

Lucien Guitry told very humorously about the explanations people gave to apologize for their departure. "One told me that it was for his wife, who had heart trouble, another for his children who couldn't stand sleepless nights, a third for his mother-in-law whose health was frail, a fourth because it was the usual time for his season at Vichy or at Aix, and all added in a confident tone: Of course, if it were only for myself, I should have stayed, but one can't shirk his responsibilities to the women, the old men and the children, can one?"

Such people disgust me so, added M. Guitry in his deep voice, drawing himself up to his full height, that I said to some of them:

"We're leaving too, but for other reasons: we're going because we are afraid.

Glacial silence. . . .

M. France.—But those who go to the banks of the Garonne to cry war to the bitter end and battle to death are truly brave. I'm sure even you here consider the situation not quite as bad as yesterday. It's all a matter of perspective.

Tea was served just in the nick of time to put all these fugitives in a more comfortable humor, for they felt a little ill at ease under the Master's sarcasms. Their self-confidence revived eating chocolate éclairs and tarts made under Mlle. Laprevotte's special supervision. They found the cakes ex-

cellent. Everyone spoke of the privations they endured, of the poor bread and the servants who were away.

M. France.—We really haven't much to complain of. You saw my servant, didn't you? He's quite satisfactory, isn't he, Emma? Well, he's a Russian.

They were astonished.

M. France.—Yes, and what's funnier still, he's not a Bolshevik. The other day he didn't want to admit Rappoport.

The very name of Rappoport revived their gaiety. They spoke of his trial, of all the trials in progress: Bolo, Duva, Leymarie, Marion, Landau.

M. France.—It won't be very long before Caillaux is shot. In connection with all these trials, you've seen that Barthou is going to give evidence as a witness in Poincaré's defense since the latter's greatness condemns him to silence. I must read to you the letter I wrote to Barthou on this question. Here is the important sentence. "Like a new Malherbes you go to defend M. Veto before the jurisdiction where there is a possibility of his being attacked." Isn't that fine? I was quite proud of that little sentence. Barthou replied that he had laughed over it and read it to Poincaré, who had also laughed. Isn't it true, though?

Everybody fell upon Poincaré, on Clemenceau, and the be-moaning was resumed. In this fashion this Sunday afternoon in June 1918, these Parisians so happy to be away from Paris found consolation in the salon of La Bechellerie. The least worried, actually, was M. France.

M. France.—I can't believe in defeat. Germany can't keep up much longer, her advantages are more superficial than real. The French soldier is there to repair the stupidities or the cowardice of the others. He has the fine, noble virtues of our race, which is rich in military qualities. What a shame that the best of us must be killed off like this. France is being exhausted, and that's the saddest part of it.

These reflections didn't move the others. What they wanted was the end, a speedy end at any cost. All clamored for it and expressed their desire for it except M. Moutet, who took refuge in a prudent and dignified silence.

M. France was glad when they went. We returned to Tours in groups down the green roads of St. Cyr. They went back to their hotels in the city, where they paid good money for abominable garrets, but places where they could, after all, sleep.

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During these agitated weeks we went to see the Master every afternoon either at Tridon's or D.'s, a dry goods merchant who was at this time in the heyday of his popularity with M. France. He would take us upstairs to a very tiny room in which were displayed the dresses, waists and lingerie that the good D. sold to the women working in the munition factories, who, having lots of money, paid a great deal of attention to their persons. Sitting in the midst of open boxes filled with lace chemises and fine batiste pantaloons, M. France would question his devoted friends on the course of events.

—Well, what's new. What's the latest?

They would tell him the despatches and he would comment on them. Worried he certainly was, but in these dark days he always seemed to me less discouraged than those about him.

M. France.—Perhaps we'll halt them. Germans don't know how to profit by their advantages. In 1914 they had only to take Paris, a few days ago they could have taken Amiens and they did not do it. Why is it, D., that they didn't take it?

But D., completely absorbed in his numerous customers and summoned by his wife's musical voice, hurried downstairs. We chatted as we waited for him.

M. France.—Isn't D. delightful? He has an astonishingly broad intelligence and a sound judgment. He sees very well where we're bound for, that is, for ruin.

—Meanwhile he is getting rich selling dresses and skirts and other gewgaws to working girls, for the time being rather prosperous.

M. France.—Let's leave these poor people alone, with their temporarily high salaries, and their joy in being able to dress like the bourgeois. They despise them and yet want to imitate them. They could have chosen better models, but for the proletariat there's no sweeter dream than to be like the bourgeois. In women of the people this desire has become immoderate. They satisfy it by coming today to buy these delicate lingeries, these dresses they've hungered for so long and which they despaired of ever being able to afford. Love will seem better to them because they'll be better dressed. One illusion will lead to another. A mere chance permits them to enjoy the illusion of wealth at the very moment when it is disappearing. The bourgeoisie hates the working class more than ever because it sees it emerging from its misery. This stupid bourgeoisie doesn't realize that the long war is harmful to itself alone. Every day that passes adds to its ruin, for it is the one that pays. Its wealth is in a fair way of disappearing between the plutocrats and the workers. Its interests lay in a short war, but it wants it to go on indefinitely. It had left but one power, but one superiority, money. Now it's throwing that away. There is an animal, it seems, that eats, its own feet. . . . It should become the symbol of the bourgeoisie.

D. came upstairs again, his face happy over some good bargain and the prosperity of his business.

D.—My dear Master, Russia has made peace, she has abolished capital and she is right. She has at last realized

the dream of a better and a more just society from which misery has disappeared.

Nevertheless citizen D.'s pockets were full of that vile, valueless paper he was piling up, profiting from circumstances as all were doing who could. He denounced the war and profited by it. He greeted the advent of Bolshevism and bought notes and bonds in the *Defense Nationale*.

The Master closed his eyes to these contradictions in his friend, remembering his words alone.

After leaving D. the Master would stop at Tridon's. The store overflowed with Americans. Sitting there in the only chair in the place, he would hold interminable discussions with the royalist L. D. on war and peace, on the value of the republican regime and of the monarchy.

L. D.—My dear Master, it is the Republic that prolongs the war. A king would have made peace long ago because, not being a slave to opinion, he would not have had to reckon with it. He would have made peace because, being the father of his subjects, he wouldn't have wanted to go on having them massacred indefinitely.

M. France.—Child, party spirit makes you blind and yet there's some truth in what you say. Doubtlessly a monarchy would have been freer to make peace, but wouldn't it have given way before it had done anything. Thrones are toppling everywhere or are about to topple. Emperor Charles wants peace but is helpless. Nicholas II fell because he wanted to remain faithful to the alliance. William II realizes that peace without victory will sweep away him and his dynasty. The peoples are now in the power of violent forces beyond anyone's control. You can be certain that the monied powers who wanted and brought about this war dominate kings as well as the people, and that everybody is enslaved.

—The Socialists as well.



M. France.—I admit it. Yet you must consider that it's the socialist republic of Russia that was the first to make peace.

—At what price?

M. France.—I grant you that, too, but after all, it did make peace. Thus it furnished an example and a lesson.

The news now became more cheerful, the situation looked more encouraging, one offensive succeeded another.

Summer passed in the midst of these strenuous offensives. M. France's salon continued to be crowded. M. France attributed our success to the American reinforcements.

M. France.—What credit will we be able to take for beating Germany? To succeed, it will have taken the entire world. Even beaten, Germany will be proud of having defied the universe, and never will defeat intoxicate a people as it will them. If peace doesn't bring about a United States of Europe, it will be only a truce and everything will begin all over again.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE HISTORICAL CHRIST

**M**FRANCE was always ready to discuss the history of the origins of Christianity and his friend Doctor C. supplied him with extremely interesting material. M. France's theories were entirely dominated by one exclusive idea from which he could not be turned, no matter how one tried. He didn't believe, he wouldn't believe, in the historical Christ. For him, Jesus had never existed.

M. France.—I refuse to believe in the existence of a historical Christ. This is also Dr. C.'s opinion, and his opinion is substantiated by the thorough study he is making of this exciting question with such rare and penetrating intelligence. Yes, I realize this must seem extraordinary to you, yet there are numerous weighty arguments in my favor. To begin with, the first witness who wrote on Jesus was Paul, and that's a fact not sufficiently known. Now Paul never saw Christ in flesh and blood, so that this first witness is thus inadequate and suspect. The person of the historical Christ hasn't an important place in Paul's work, everything is subordinated to the idea of redemption. Christ came to redeem men, to draw them away from the tyranny of the ancient law and give them, with a new gospel, a new life.

This idea aroused vigorous protests in the room. How could that be proved. Hadn't Paul always said that he was an apostle of the spirit, thus distinguishing himself from the apostles who remained in Jerusalem whom he himself called the apostles of the flesh. Isn't that plain enough and what else could these words "apostles of the flesh" mean but pre-

cisely to distinguish between them and the apostle of the spirit? A few had seen Christ alive whom he, Paul, hadn't known. Can that be denied?

M. France.—This argument seems stronger than it really is. Paul, in designating the apostles of Jerusalem as apostles of the flesh, was actually referring to their fidelity to the ancient law to circumcision to which they remained loyal, while Paul was an apostle of the spirit, rejecting circumcision and the ancient law. Consider that the synoptics, Mark, Matthew and Luke, had scarcely written their gospels before seventy, long after Christ's earthly existence was over, if he ever existed. They don't agree on any point of Christ's earthly existence, neither on the date nor the place of his birth, nor on his filiation. Everything is confused by the desire of the evangelists to make the life of their hero harmonize with the predictions of the Old Testament. Don't you see how vague and uncertain that is? Isn't it extraordinary that a man who had such an astonishing life should be so poorly and so little known to his contemporaries? John doesn't give us a single useful piece of information; he is not the author of the fourth Gospel. The unknown author meditates mystically on Christ, he does not know him, He is outside of, above history. All the early sources dissolve and disappear under our hands. Paul saw nothing. He is the first witness, the closest to the earthly existence and life of Christ. The Evangelists don't agree on anything. Where are the proofs, then? How is it that contemporary Latin authors knew nothing, made no mention of such an extraordinary existence? It's scarcely credible. This marvelous life couldn't have been unfolded like this in an unknown corner of Judea. The Romans were too well informed on what was going on in the empire for none of them not to have spoken of it. There is only Pliny's text, which dates from about 111 or 112. . . . Yes, I admit there is this text, it's the only one on which one can rely with rela-

tive certitude. But even it is not exact. The historians of the reign of Tiberius don't speak of Christ. Pilate could never have had anything to do with this extraordinary man without some trace being left of it.

—That idea inspired a mighty good story of yours, *The Procurator of Judea*.

M. France.—Though written in the guise of a fantasy, I don't think I have ever been closer to the historical truth. To whomever says that the passage in Pliny is authentic we can reply that it may be an interpolation. At any rate, it's not inconceivable. A pious copyist could easily have invented this passage for the sake of the cause. You can be certain that Jesus is only a myth, that he never existed. This is the only way we can account for the inconsistencies, the many divergent accounts of his earthly existence. The isolated testimony of Pliny proves nothing, absolutely nothing.

Lively objections were advanced. Renan, Loisy, Guignebert, and Sabatier believed in the existence of the historical Christ. They did not come to this conclusion without good reasons. "Hasn't this any weight with you, Master?"

M. France.—Not enough to convince me: have you read Drews' *Le Christ a-t'il vecu?* He has assembled many arguments in this little book and arranged them in a scholarly way. Read it and come back in a week. Dr. C. will be here and we shall discuss the question again.

All of us kept the rendezvous. Dr. C. was there; the Master expected us.

M. France.—Well, let's resume our discussion. Did you read Drews' book? What did you think of it?

He was astonished to see that his audience was not convinced. Turning to Dr. C.

M. France.—Come, C.; tell them, prove to them that Jesus is a myth, that he is not a man who became God, but rather a God who became man.

Dr. C., who spoke very well and in a calm and pleasant voice, began his work of destruction. His criticism was sharp and well presented, and produced the effect of a drop of vinegar on limestone, a slight bubbling and the whole edifice of traditional opinion disappeared. Still young, stout, with a smiling face and eyes that seemed to be also smiling, Dr. C. folded his elbows and spoke.

Dr. C.—What can I tell you that you don't already know, or that the Master, who knows everything, has not already told you? Jesus couldn't have existed. He must be a myth. For the traces of his earthly existence are very vague. Paul attaches little importance to the historical facts of the life of Jesus. Having been in a position to question the evidences of this life, he nevertheless showed a profound indifference toward them. His epistles tell us nothing about the life of Jesus. If they should happen to be lost we would know neither more or less about the historical Christ. He considers Jesus only from the angle of the spiritual salvation of man, the rest doesn't concern him. What he does show, as Professor Drew says, is a divine personality, a spiritual and celestial being, a type absolutely devoid of individuality, and super-human.

—Doesn't Paul speak, someone objected, of having seen the Lord's brother at Jerusalem?

Dr.—I know, but is it a brother of the flesh? Isn't this rather the terminology of that spiritual fraternity current in the rising sect? The members of the first Christian communities spoke of one another this way. Isn't it thus that we must interpret Chapter IX: 5 of the Epistle of the Corinthians? No, Paul's testimony isn't convincing. There remains that of the evangelists. But these were later than Paul. They could not know what he himself was ignorant of; what they did know they got from oral tradition, and we know how dubious this source is. No gospel could have been com-



posed before 70. About 40 years passed between the death of Christ and the first editing. It is in the Christian communities that the details of this surprising life were preserved. Think how many lacunæ or imaginary elaborations they must have been subjected to. Moreover, the contradictions between the synoptics are evident. We don't possess a single authentic word of Christ. Everything that is attributed to him is said with the purpose, or to the end of instruction. The synoptic gospels are without historical value. As to the silence of contemporary authors on Jesus, it is an impressive fact that passages bearing on him in Suetonius are Christian interpolations. There remains the famous passage in Tacitus; one line on the persecutions of the Christians under Nero. But there our difficulties begin all over again. Did this persecution really take place? Couldn't the whole story of the burning of Rome by Nero very well have been the work of a copyist monk of the IVth or Vth century? Still further, if contemporary Latin authors said nothing about Jesus—which might perhaps be explained by their disdainful indifference to the Jews, how can the silence of Jewish authors of the same period be explained—of a Philo of Alexandria, a Justus of Tiberias, a Josephus, who made not a single allusion to him in his ancient history of the Jews. That not one of them should have spoken of their illustrious co-religionist seems improbable. This silence made a deep impression on the Christians of the first centuries; they felt its importance; they remedied it by interpolations we identify to-day with great difficulty. All that raises a doubt, a doubt which becomes so considerable that we can commit ourselves to a complete negation with a certain amount of confidence.

M. France.—That's what I have been saying all along. Isn't it quite clear, and aren't we in the presence of an infinitely serious and upsetting criticism? There was no historical Christ. Israel and other peoples were waiting for a

Messiah. Jesus was only the name given to this dream and desire: he never really existed. Paul, with his genius and energy, established this myth in the soundest way. With his formidable personality, he convinced the whole world.

Dr. C.—What I am most struck by is the silence of contemporary authors. There is a rich Jewish literature contemporaneous with Jesus. There is the Palestinian literature of the period. There are the writings of the Jewish doctors, all that has been preserved in the Talmud and tells us nothing about Jesus of Nazareth. As to the passage Pliny wrote about 112, what does it prove? that at this time there were Christians who believed in somebody called Chrestus. But that doesn't give us any information on the historical Christ. All the literature of the Church fathers at the beginning of the second century is as poor in historical details as Pauline Literature.

—Why in Mark III. 24 and 31 to 35 is it stated that the partisans of Jesus considered him mad? Could Christians of later times have imagined that; or, again, in Mark VI. 5 "And he could there do no mighty work." Aren't we actually dealing here with a figure that is real, alive? Finally Paul, in the first Corinthians IX. 1, is disputing with some Jews who say to him, "You are not an apostle: you didn't see the Lord at all." There is, then, a Christ of the flesh who didn't see Paul and one of the spirit who saw and knew him. Is this distinction entirely without significance?

Dr. C.—Jesus is not a real name. It is an expression which represents the redeeming and liberating God who dies and is reborn. Jesus travels across Galilee with his twelve apostles, arrives at Jerusalem, offers up a lamb in sacrifice. This is nothing but a cult of the sun, of its passage across the Zodiac. It is an astral myth.

Time passed quickly in the salon of La Bechellerie in this discussion, which was one of the most interesting we had.

We hurled sacred texts from the Pauline epistles and of the synoptic gospels at one another, and passages from Professor Drews' book. M. France had gotten out the Bible to look up the texts in the Gospels we needed. At each argument of Dr. C.'s he would nod his handsome head in approval. The discussion ended in general tumult. The partisans of the historical Christ developed their opinions and brandished their texts, appealing to the Master's common sense and logic, while he kept playing with his red cap and shouting:

"An interpolation, I tell you it's an interpolation! Jesus is a manifestation of the solar cult. The number 12 is fatidical. You find it elsewhere. Look at Napoleon and his twelve marshals."

We were never able to bring M. France to believe in this historical Christ. As far as I know he persisted to the end. Once I brought him Huignebert's volume, *La vie cachée de Jesus*: I called his attention to the fact that the author believes in the earthly life of Jesus and that the arguments he presents in reply to Drews' are not without their value.

Bah! he answered. With texts you can do whatever you want. M. Renan, for example, was able to present a Jesus who resembles neither Strauss' Jesus nor any other. You can support anything with texts and you can always find texts.

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Each time that Dr. C. visited La Bechellerie the conversation revolved around these exciting questions. Dr. C. brought to them a knowledge, an erudition, a lucidity that gave his words charm to which everyone finally succumbed. Other conversations dropped off one by one and Dr. C. would be left the only one speaking in his soft, calm, impressive voice.

One day Dr. C. and I were sitting on the couch by the window. He was talking to me about the composition of the Epistles of Paul, of his style, also of the Apocalypse which

he had just published with what he considered an entirely new interpretation. M. France was opposite us by the fireplace, looking at us both. He was obviously distressed at not being able to hear what Dr. C. was saying and annoyed by the people who were talking around him. Finally he called over to Dr. C.

M. France.—Why can't we all hear what you're talking about? It must be very absorbing, for you're not paying any attention to anything or anyone else.

Dr. C. began to laugh.

—We were speaking of Saint Paul.

M. France.—Well, go on speaking so that we can all hear.

Dr. C.—We agree on his style and the composition of his epistles. It is a great error to think that the epistles were written to be sent to the communities. In apostolic times the pneumatic life—that is, the faculty of speaking under the influence of the Spirit—was intense; accentuated by the extraordinary religious activity of the communities. Paul spoke under the direct influence of the Spirit and by a prodigious effort of the mind transported himself to the communities of Corinth, of Ephesus. Separated from them by distance, his genius and his mystic gift placed him in the midst of his brothers and so he spoke, he addressed them, as if he were right in their presence. His style, therefore, is not literary but almost crude, because spoken. A companion acting as secretary collected the words and sentences Paul uttered under the influence of inspiration. Then someone added the superscriptions, the forms of address, and the epistle was sent off. This ardent spirit could talk powerfully but he scarcely could have known how to write. Flowing lava must spread freely and it was in words that this lava poured forth.

M. France.—C., you are subtle and ingenious and your comments are wonderful.

Dr. C.—His style has been called crude. Hasn't Paul



been defined as a tormented genius? We don't know precisely the character of the great religious founder, but perhaps it would be unfair to judge it by his style. Indeed, the epistles kept in the religious communities underwent strange modifications. They were written on sheets which were undoubtedly not numbered. Those who received them first read them in order, but little by little this order was deranged and in the post-apostolic generations, it no longer existed. Paul's uneven style may perhaps be due to nothing other than the errors of pagination. In fact one is tempted to make rather curious experiments: take an epistle of Paul's, change the place of certain passages, alternate one with the other, and far from resulting in incoherence, this makes a different text with a different meaning, equally possible and acceptable. The supposition I made a moment ago about the errors of pagination gains a certain likelihood in the experiment I have just described. Moreover, Paul is being much studied in England from this new angle. It is possible that we may soon have an edition of the epistles arranged in an entirely different way and having an entirely different meaning. I myself have done a similar piece of work with the *Apocalypse*, which is, as you know, attributed to the apostle John. You are, of course, acquainted with this passionate piece of writing. It can be read just as it is, but also in another way that changes the entire character of the work. I for one found in it the rhythms of ancient Hebrew poetry. The *Apocalypse* is a poem.

M. France.—How curious it all is. The problem of the origins of Christianity remains an eternally new source of discoveries.

From Saint Paul the conversation went to Saint Anthony and Dr. C. demolished a legend in passing.

Dr. C.—In the province of Iseré there is a famous pilgrimage to Saint Anthony and this saint is an object of a special



devotion in this region. They still retain the memory of a malady very common in the Middle Ages and called the burning sickness, a sort of decomposition of the blood in the course of which the fingers and toes became decomposed and fell off. I have seen instruments which the surgeons of the time used for necessary operations. Some are in reality instruments of torture, but others show a little knowledge of the needs of the operator. The monastery of the Antonines was celebrated for the cures they effected or were reputed to effect in this disease. They took care of the sick with applications of grease from young hogs. For this purpose the monastery raised a great many of these animals, and to impress upon the people the fact that they were valuable, put little bells around their necks. They followed the monks about, so that it became a common sight to see these Antoinettes always with their little pigs. This animal thus became their inseparable companion and soon Saint Anthony was never represented without his pig. Nothing in the life or in the legend of Saint Anthony himself could have been responsible for this, it must be attributed to the specialty of the Antonines of curing this disease with the grease of young hogs. And this is how legends spring up.

M. France.—Yes, but they are ineradicable and stronger than truth, for you can't demand that this explanation be accepted, although it's highly probable, and that Saint Anthony be separated from his faithful companion. The burning sickness no longer exists today but in the beginning of the 19th century there was still some trace of it. M. de Reze relates that Louis XVIII suffered from it and that in the last days of his life the toes of one foot fell off into his stocking.

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One can't exaggerate the warm friendship existing between M. France, Dr. C. and Mme. S., who often met at La

Bechellerie. He showed them the most extreme consideration.

It was after the war, at St. Cyr, that the marriage of Dr. C. and Mme. S. was celebrated and at La Bechellerie that the reception that followed the marriage took place.

This marriage, solemnized at last, hadn't been all smooth sailing. They had wanted it to be a religious one, a delicate matter because of one of the parties. But everything was arranged and the marriage was celebrated in the church of St. Cyr. On this occasion M. France praised the kindly wisdom of the curé of St. Cyr-sur-Loire, who had consented to officiate at the union.

M. France.—He's really quite intelligent. He had a few scruples but they were easily overridden. She is Greek orthodox, I said to him, therefore it doesn't matter very much that she has been divorced, since she is not Catholic. If she were it would be a different thing. But this orthodox lady is heretical, a curious contradiction of terms! For, after all, how can an orthodox person be heretical? The curé gave in to our reasons.

In the years that followed the war Dr. and Mme. C. absented themselves more and more from La Bechellerie, like so many others whom I had seen come and go. They were still quite intimate at the time of the marriage of M. France and Mlle. Laprevotte. After that no more was seen of them.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE PEACE TREATY AND AFTER THE WAR

THE armistice and the end of the war brought M. France an intense and real happiness. His joy was very great indeed and when I saw him for the first time after this tremendous event, he cried:

—It's over, and you'll soon be able to put on civilian clothes, my dear friend. Are you glad?

I assured him I was very glad.

The visitors were numerous, little Lieutenant S., a deputy at the Court-martial council of the war, who represented the war-to-the-bitter-end faction in the Master's salon and who added to his archæological talents those of spy, found himself vigorously challenged on all sides.

M. France.—Well, it's over and here you are, a hero out of employment. Peace will be dull for enthusiasts like you—nobody to denounce any more, to pursue, to condemn; peace will force you into idleness.

The lieutenant made an effort to smile. He was very much embarrassed. He declared that the armistice was premature, that if they had gone on two weeks more the German army would have been captured.

M. France.—What! the armistice premature after five years of war! Why, you're crazy! Haven't you had enough mourning and ruins? This armistice, comes late, yes late, you understand. You can have no heart, no feeling to talk like that.

And we spoke of the peace.

M. France.—What will it be like? That's the question.

How will our diplomats understand it and go about drawing it up? Clemenceau should retire, for he hasn't any of the qualities necessary to a plenipotentiary. But he won't. He's intoxicated, he thinks he has a genius. All the incense that his censerbearers burn under his nose goes to his head. He lives in an artificial world, he'll only commit follies. If peace doesn't result in a United States of Europe, it will create a situation worse than the armed peace of 1914. Well, we'll see. For the moment let's be happy that it's over.

In fact only happy faces were to be seen at La Bechellerie. The American Wasser spoke of his demobilization and was getting ready for a voyage to Italy, for which M. France was supplying him with some information.

—Above all, don't fail to go to Sicily. You must see Taormine, it's the most beautiful panorama in the world.

Among the different questions the armistice and the cessation of hostilities brought up, demobilization interested us most of all. Some declared it would be difficult, others, on the contrary, were sure it would go off very well, since everyone was so elated at the idea of going home. M. France was of this opinion.

M. France.—I am firmly convinced nothing will happen. These men who were so atrociously ill-treated and who are for the moment full of bitterness and hate, will abandon their grudge with their uniforms. The power of forgetfulness in man is so great that they won't remember anything. They ought to insist upon large bonuses, but they'll say nothing. More than that, they will gloss over everything, approve of everything. When they see Joffre on the screen they will applaud. I've already told you that war is so much part of man's nature that they won't keep too unpleasant a memory of it since it satisfies the most deeply imbedded sentiments in man's heart, idleness and vanity. Many will

even miss this adventurous and heroic existence. Peace will seem dull and monotonous to them.

A few of us protested.

M. France.—You don't know the nature of man and your sentiments are misguided. You're exceptions and you judge the masses as yourselves, who are very, very different. Please believe that I'm sorry that they aren't inspired with another spirit, that they don't know how to keep alive that spirit of revolt which, under the influence of suffering, is born even in the hearts of the simple. They could give us the Revolution and great things. I haven't any such hope, it won't last. The joy of their newly recovered liberty will wipe it out in one moment. Our good sense is really a hindrance; it is the best guaranty our masters have against avenging angers. It assures them impunity and even glory. Clemenceau crowned with laurels, together with Poincaré and Mandel—isn't that a fine prospect?

We spent the year 1918 discussing the peace which was about to be negotiated, and which M. France foresaw as hateful, of the influenza, which was making furious ravages. M. France, who often went to Paris, would come back with deplorable news. People were dying with appalling rapidity, there were scarcely enough people to bury them, and the weekly statistics of the city of Paris reported continually mounting figures. This gave M. France an excuse for declaring that we were all poisoned and that peace would bring its benefits to a cemetery.

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It is hard at this time, toward the end of 1919, that the death of Mme. Psichari occurred, a daughter of M. France's first marriage, the divorced wife of Captain Mollin. The Master, notified of the death, took the midnight train in order to be in Paris by the morning and be present at the



funeral. Our grief-stricken Master was accompanied on this trip by his faithful friend D. the drygoods merchant. He was not gone very long.

The Sunday after the funeral my friend the Comte de C. and myself wondered whether or not we should go up to La Bechellerie as usual. We finally made up our minds to go and climbed the familiar road this cold, foggy winter day.

As we somewhat timidly opened the door of the salon we saw the Master sitting in an armchair by the fireplace with Mlle. Laprevotte at his side. He arose with difficulty, as if he carried the grief of the universe on his shoulders. His trousers were tucked under the flaps of his slippers, which gave him a pathetic but comical look.

In reply to our expressions of sympathy he took each of us by the shoulders and kissed us tenderly and effusively. The Master customarily went through this ceremony. Tears ran down his cheeks and on to his moustache and beard. He wiped them away with the back of his hand. Mlle. Laprevotte remained silent.

M. France.—Ah, my friends, my poor friends, how good of you to come today. I am so downcast, I am overcome with grief. My daughter, my poor Suzanne, taken away so suddenly without my having had a chance to see her. It's frightful, I can't stop crying. Life is worth nothing to me any more. As soon as I heard the fatal news, I left that very night. I didn't know what I was doing, where I was going. Without D. I shouldn't have gotten there. He took care of me like a baby. And that ceremony. It was so melancholy. At the cemetery, when the coffin was lowered, my whole being trembled. D. was obliged to take me away. My daughter, all I had, all that was left to me. I can still see her as a child, a little girl, playing about the house with her dolls. She was so amusing. Yes, I can see it all

over again. And then, afterwards, so many things. . . . I was perhaps too strict with her . . . how I regret this severity of mine . . . how I should have liked to tell her I forgave her . . . that I loved her. . . .

All these sentences were broken with sobs. Winter shadows soon filled the salon where the four of us sat; only the wood-fire burning in the hearth gave out a little light to the room—they had forgotten to bring lamps. It was a sad sight to see this old man sitting in the darkness crushed by his grief.

M. France.—She leaves a son, my grandson. We'll take him, we'll bring him up, won't we, Mademoiselle?

Mlle. Laprevotte made a gesture of assent.

M. France—Besides, he's a charming lad. I've seen him and I'm very fond of him already. He'll come here and I'll put him in the Lycée, and watch over his studies; I want to take the place of his father and mother. Yes, it is my duty, I shall do it. What a week, my good friends, what a week! If it were only a week ago, I could still see her, tell her I loved her. Today it's too late, it's irreparable, it's all over.

As we rose to take our leave, the bereaved Master spoke to us affectionately.

—Ah, my good friends, it was a beautiful sign of your friendship to come to comfort me in my sorrow like this. I shall never forget it, if I have the strength to survive this blow.

And again the Master kissed us.

On the way back to Tours through the rain and mud, my friend and I discussed M. France's attitude. His great grief filled us with tremendous pity. So M. France loved, had always loved his daughter. In spite of the faults with which he reproached her, he still felt a father's tenderness for her. My friend C. said:

—Can you get over it? I'm overcome with astonishment. These tears, this grief—I can't understand it. Why, the Master was nearly blind with tears!

—Neither can I, I answered. But will it last? We must go back in a week to see how he'll be by then.

A week later we returned. It was an entirely different sight we saw, the aspect of everything had changed. We found the Master in the highest of spirits, smiling, jovial, good-humored, and telling with his usual wit the stories we took such delight in. We were both puzzled by the way his grief had so quickly gone, by his frivolous gaiety—the same cunning smile, the same red cap sitting bravely on his handsome head as usual.

Was this the same man we had seen a week ago lamenting, overcome with sorrow, prostrate. Was he sincere or was he playing some comedy for us? It's an elusive question. For my part, I think M. France was sincere, that his grief was real but short lived and that when he had gone through the ritual of mourning, the weeping and bemoaning, when enough tears had fallen into his beard, he turned once more toward life, which he loved, with a calm and smiling face. The dead woman was already in the past . . . very far away. Did M. France even remember her?

Mlle. Laprevotte, on this occasion, in reply to my comment on the change that had come over M. France, said:

“Yes, for the moment M. France is grief-stricken. But he finds consolation quickly enough.”

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With the spring of 1919 came demobilization. M. France rejoiced to see me in civilian clothes. A few days later occurred the sudden death of the Comte de C. who had for years been my faithful companion at La Bechellerie. I informed M. France, who was deeply moved for several moments.

He accompanied the funeral procession as far as the door of the church, and as I spoke to him of the details of this painful death . . .

M. France.—Never has my conviction been stronger that there is no life after death. Our friend is gone, you remember how many times we discussed this question together. Why doesn't he come to us today with the solution. There's nothing, nothing.

Demobilization brought about the separation of many of the visitors at La Bechellerie. It was with sadness and regret that the Master witnessed the departure of Dr. B., whom the Master loved; with joy that of Dr. J., whom he considered an imbecile, and of Lieutenant S., whom he rightly considered a spy.

At the beginning of 1919 came the gravest period of Mlle. Laprevotte's illness. One saw nothing but physicians at La Bechellerie. They came from Tours, from Paris, from everywhere. Mlle. Laprevotte temporarily lost her powers of speech. M. France continued nevertheless to receive and his salon was as crowded as ever. In spite of his anxiety, which seemed real, he welcomed everyone heartily. Nothing but peace was discussed.

M. France.—No king of France would have dared to conceive of a peace like the one that's going to be made. The idea of three powers conceiving a peace and imposing it on the defeated enemy is an error and will finally make Europe uninhabitable. The partitioning of Austria is a folly. To balkanize the center of Europe is to scatter new seeds of war. England knows what she wants; she helps herself first to the colonies and the German fleet, she gives us nothing but promises and a credit which will doubtlessly be irrecoverable. Never will there have been such a harmful peace, one more injurious to our country. But the most amusing thing in it all is Wilson. He knows nothing

about Europe or its history and yet he comes here and tries to measure out the rights of States on scales. He distributes justice by the milligram. These Protestants are terrible. They mix great financial interests with biblical problems. The result is odious. I have a horror of such people, they do nothing but harm.

Someone mentioned Lloyd George.

M. France.—Ah, what's to be done about it? He uses the same vocabulary as Wilson but his is quite different: he's a crafty fellow, the other gives an impression of candor. Lloyd George reads the Bible and chants the Psalms but fills his country's pockets and serves its interests at the same time. He's a typical Englishman; it won't be long before he abandons us, for at bottom he detests us. Alone, France doesn't appear equal to her task, not strong enough, because of her allies, to make a victorious peace, not weak and resigned enough to accept a peace which might hasten a reconciliation of peoples and permit the resumption of ordinary work. We hesitate between these two conceptions: an imperialistic peace or a peace of reconciliation. We do not wish to, we are unable to decide frankly for one or the other. Clemenceau is inclined toward the first, the allies seem to hypocritically be in favor of the second. The treaty of Versailles is a poor compromise between these two tendencies. It shows the effects of these contradictions, it carries them within it, it doesn't guarantee peace and new wars will certainly come of it.

These views cheered us very little. Still under the spell of the newly gained peace, we protested against the Master's pessimism and refused to believe in the future he painted in such dark colors.

M. France.—I am too old to say to you: In ten years let us meet again and you'll see how right I am. In ten years I won't be here any more, but I beg of you who are young



to remember that I was not wrong. This peace is a failure. For France it will be a terrible blow. We shall never be paid. How can you expect Germany to pay by herself 232,000 millions, the total figure of the reparations, I believe? Why is she asked to admit that she alone was guilty? And what a stupid idea, to try the Emperor of Germany! It is the people and certain classes of interested parties who are responsible for the war, and it is silly to attempt to place complete responsibility for such significant events upon a single man. There are culprits everywhere; England is not without them, nor Russia. It's all falsehood, hypocrisy and deception. The peoples whose hates have been aroused must be satisfied. But it's impossible to give them what they've been promised. These are matters that were glossed over during the war, that are still alive at this moment. Out in the plenipotentiary negotiations, mines, coal, oil, fleets, markets, are more important than the rights of the peoples, than the liberation of the oppressed and the establishment of a stable peace. Money, money dominates and crushes everything else. Capitalism portions out the world, laughs at the blood spilled, the human lives sacrificed. No king, representing and guarding a real national interest, would ever have tolerated that. He would have rebelled against this bloody capitalism, against this occult power that holds in its hands the fate of the civilized world. That's what no one dares to say.

M. France revealed his ideas on the evils of international capital over and over again, but it was at the time of the peace of Versailles that he spoke with the most bitterness and despair. Though he was no doubt partly right in the criticisms he made with so much vehemence, he appeared rather vague when he was asked what should be done and what his solutions were for the problems created by peace. I heard him give only vague and uncertain answers, steeped

in a general humanitarianism, to be sure, but not very definite.

M. France took pleasure in making fun of Wilson, whom he considered an idealist armed with excellent intentions which only caused catastrophes and misfortunes in the world. Moreover, he believed Europe to be in a state of advanced decomposition, the destruction of the Austrian Empire seemed stupid to him, and the return of Russia to Asiatic barbarism a rupture of the European balance of power, maintained with so much difficulty in the XIXth century.

M. France.—Talleyrand and Metternich were more successful. They didn't try to bring about the happiness of the people; in this way they at least permitted them to breathe.

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In the years that followed 1919 war and peace ceased to be the single subject of M. France's conversations. He became preoccupied with other matters. Mlle. Laprevotte, scarcely recovered from her operations and her serious illnesses of 1919, started the intrigue that finally culminated in her marriage. She was aided by certain intimates of the Master.

What was M. France's real feeling for the woman they advised him to marry? It's difficult to say, as well as the reasons that brought him to marry one whom he often ridiculed. I have often seen him exercise his humor and irony at her expense. She remained unaffected by these witticisms, in fact she scarcely perceived them. Nothing could arouse her natural indolence. She frequently opened her mouth to speak and closed it again without having said anything.

"Tico is a rare woman," M. France would say, "she has an opinion on every subject, but never gives it."

One day M. France was trying out a gold pen on a

blank piece of paper; he handed it to Mlle. Laprevotte:

"Come, Mademoiselle, make a few strokes, show everybody that you can write."

If we were discussing some matter of literature or art, M. France would always ask the opinion of Tico (abbreviation for Petit Coco, Mlle. Laprevotte's nickname).

M. France.—Tico is quite a connoisseur of art. She's a match for the antiquarians. She knows the styles and can clearly distinguish a piece of Renaissance furniture from a Louis XV chair. Ask R. if it isn't so.

Mlle. Laprevotte was given no peace except when M. France was carried away by the conversation.

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The Master talked endlessly on questions of art. He would discuss them, moreover, with local amateurs and wasn't fooled by their absurdities, their pretentiousness and shallowness. There was a certain K. who used to bring him photographs of the fine pictures he was constantly discovering.

Trembling with joy, he announced one day that he had found a drawing of Prudhon's. The Master was careful not to rob him of his delusion.

M. France.—You've made your fortune. There is no one more delightful. What a painter he was! He preserved all the charm of the XVIIIth century, restoring it to its original freshness. He had a frightfully sorrowful and unfortunate life. This painter of such joyful pieces worked under great difficulties and griefs. He was so unhappy in his home that when he was a widower and Constance Mayer asked him to marry her, he gave her such a fierce refusal that a drama resulted from it.

I love the XVIIIth century and its landscapists, for there were great landscapists in the XVIIIth century. Fragonard!

Hubert Robert! We have neglected them too much. We were willing to see only the conventional character of their work. They were closer to nature than most people realize. What I admire in their pictures is the perspective of their stairways. The architects of the XVIIIth century built some just like them. Do you know you have some at Tours near your bridge which are very beautiful? I'll show them to you.

Indeed, returning one day to La Bechellerie with the Master, M. France came back to this subject as we crossed the bridge.

M. France.—Look at the stairs of your bridge leading to the banks, aren't they beautiful? Large, with a happy perspective, they are the purest XVIIIth century. Only they are in a bad condition now, which isn't astonishing. The democracy hasn't any money for beautiful things. As for those vases at the four corners of the bridge, I'm sure they never attracted your attention. They solve a difficult question of perspective. They are large enough to be seen at a distance, yet not too tremendous when you're close to them. Had you noticed that?

I answered that I had not, but that I was struck with the truth of what he said.

M. France.—Those men knew how to build. Do you know from when your bridge dates?

—It was constructed under the administration of Du Clauzel in the second half of the XVIIIth century.

M. France.—Those great governors of the XVIIIth century were the glory of the dying monarchy. They were interested in everything. Government for them wasn't a sterile matter of red-tape, but life itself in its most varied manifestations. Beaux-Arts, industry, commerce, all these they comprehended and encouraged. Our present-day prefects are absurd in comparison.

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Mlle. Laprevotte succeeded in her purpose; M. France was persuaded to marry her. Among the reasons that brought him to this decision there was one decisive one, people say. Somebody had repeated to him a remark of his first wife's, Mme. D., who inquiring about him one day, said:

"If he dies, the seals will be put up immediately and we'll put her out."

"Her" referred to Mlle. Laprevotte.

The thought of this spectacle aroused M. France, who seemed to see, after his death, Mlle. Laprevotte packing her trunks, carrying off her clothes, and left without resources.

So he married her. The marriage took place at the town-hall of St. Cyr-sur-Loire. There were Dr. Couchoud, Cichel Corday, L. K., the American Wasser, who had been traveling in Italy and had come back expressly for this event.

The ceremony was simple. M. France wouldn't receive any delegation charged to present congratulations to him. He made an exception only for the group of women communists, and it was one Mme. B. who was received by the happy pair. Now this lady, the wife of a dismissed railroad employe, was a creature of extreme vulgarity, but her opinions redeemed her in the Master's eyes . . . the Master was at this time loyal to anything the color of bright red blood.

M. France's marriage didn't make a great change at La Bechellerie. Mme. France sat enthroned in an enormous arm-chair by a corner of the fireplace. She still found it difficult to speak. She wore loud, bright colors, that emphasized her heavy figure. Every one paid her attentions and did her favors and made her compliments. Her friends called her Emma and boasted of her astonishing qualities as mistress of the house. But I don't think she had any such marked virtues. Soiled linen lay in all corners of the house and M.



France used to say in confidence that he could never find a pair of socks without holes.

All M. France's friends who came to visit or stay at La Bechellerie began courting Mme. France. They showered boxes of candy and gifts on her. They brought her books, too, but M. France declared that she had no use for books at all any more since she had read a few of his own.

M. France.—If it's only to find such stories as those in books, it's hardly worth the trouble of breaking one's head over them.

So Mme. France lived the center of adulation. M. and Mme. L. K., and Mme. M. C., and Mme. J. L. rivaled one another in zeal. Her advice was asked, her preferences. From her high chair were handed down answers as if they were oracles. Everyone was in ecstasies and the Master declared, as if conclusively:

"Tico's charming, isn't she?" and to her—"yes, my good Tico, you're charming, delightful, a love. I love you—"and he would throw her a kiss from the tips of his fingers.

Most of the time she remained insensible to these marks of tenderness in her husband.

When she was in a good humor, she would answer him, confusing the memory of her former position with her present one:

"My dear little Monsieur France." It was very funny.

So Mme. France, flattered and spoiled, became tyrannical. An old faithful friend of the Master's whispered to me one day in the salon:

"Upon my word, she'll end up by believing that she is the one who has done him an honor by marrying him."

We have now only to discuss the few events that occurred since M. France's marriage. The arrival of his

grandson Lucien Psichari brought a little liveliness into the house. I sincerely believe that M. France loved his grandson and that his affection for him was more than an attitude. At any rate his grandson was very fond of his grandfather and showed a strong attachment for him. If he was returning from the Lycée he would hurry to run to kiss him as he entered the room. His effusions to Mme. France, whom he called grandmother, were rather mild.

M. France.—He is a nice and likeable boy; but he's lazy and that is very disturbing, for he must absolutely make a career for himself, he hasn't any fortune of his own. I first put him at Janson-de-Sailly. The Master to whom I presented him gave him an impressive talk. He began by telling Lucien that in each class there were ten pupils, the first ten, all exceptional. It was useless, he said, to attempt to rival them. Not to discourage Lucien I put him at the Lycée de Tours.

M. France recalled some of the facts of his own school life.

M. France.—I was always playing tricks, I used to unscrew my schoolmaster's and my teacher's leaden inkwells and amusing catastrophes would happen as a result of this. I was also known for setting off fire crackers in class. But I was always caught, I was never able to escape. Lucien is a serious boy. When I tell him these stories he doesn't think them funny at all. Children aren't young any more today.

One day, Lucien Psichari, just home from school, entered the salon. He told us that he had met a lady at the door who begged the honor of being received. He did not know who she was. She was waiting in the garden. Lucien Psichari asked his grandfather what he should say.

M. France.—Tell her that I am in my dotage.

L. P.—I met the carriage in which this lady was riding. I scratched it with my bicycle.

M. France with his usual obliging spirit ordered the visitor to be admitted.

The lady entered. Nobody knew her. She was very young and charming. She introduced herself and apologized for intruding. But she had so wanted to see the Master.

M. France offered her a chair. A long silence followed. Then finally M. France spoke, addressing the lady.

M. France.—Madame, it is my grandson who introduced you here. He tells me he has the honor of scratching you. The lady drew back.

M. France.—Oh, Madame, that's only a figurative, a sport term, that is to say, on the way he passed your carriage.

M. France spoke of his grandson a long time.

M. France.—He has a very sound affection for the chauffeur. He spends all his spare time with him. They examine and repair the auto together. The relations of children and servants are easy to explain and easily understood. Servants who have a poorly developed intelligence are very much like children. Formerly, in the 18th century, under Louis XVIth, the servants were really part of the *domus*, for in those days there still was a *domus*. Today the enriched bourgeoisie, which has no virtue other than its money, would think it was demeaning itself if it looked on servants with a tolerant eye. It's inferior to the great nobles of former times in this respect and in many others. Mme. la Duchesse de Choiseul who suffered from poverty during the Revolution and bore up under it bravely, was helped by a single servant who remained faithful to her. The olden days were full of charm.

—Lucien has a liking for mechanics. He makes plans for chassis that will never work. The trouble is that he doesn't know his four rules. I advised him strongly to learn them. It is true I never knew them myself.

—On the other hand Lucien has one great virtue, he already knows men. For example. His grandmother offered to take him to the Lycée in the auto. He refused energetically on the grounds that his comrades would make life impossible for him. He is right. Children have exactly the same fault as men; they are jealous and envious.

—He was invited to supper by the master of the Lycée, and as I complimented him on his relations with the master, he answered me, winking mischievously: "Don't poke fun at me, now. You know very well that it is because of you that I am invited. A master doesn't invite a little shaver of my age."

Lucien Psichari wasn't safer than anyone else from his grandfather's jokes. One day the Master kept repeating:

—My grandson is a nice boy but his knickers are too short. Tell me, Tico, why are Lucien's knickers too short?

After which he kissed him heartily.

Lucien P. was very devoted to Michel Corday.

"That isn't astonishing," said M. France, "They are of the same age."

In 1922 M. France won the Nobel prize. He was away from La Bechellerie for a long time and as soon as he came back we asked him to tell us about his trip. He gave us a very lively account of it.

M. France.—I left with Mme. France, Lucien was also with us, and Francois Crucy. I went through Berlin.

—What did you think of it?

M. France.—The city never has been beautiful. I don't like it. It seemed dismal. The vanished court has left a great void. All life centers around the bars and night restaurants where the Germans spend their money drinking and dancing. Money has so little value that they hesitate to keep it, and so turn it into immediate pleasures. They are right. Tomorrow perhaps, it would cost twice as much.

I was very uncomfortable at the hotel. There was no linen. My towel wasn't larger than my handkerchief. At table they use paper napkins.

I met two rather curious personalities. Einstein received me very graciously, only I wasn't able to talk with him for a long time. He spoke of his works, he told me that light was matter, and then my head began to swim and I thought it best to go away. I also met Professor Nicolai. What a fine and appealing man he is. You must all know of his adventures. He entered the German army in 1914 as a physician with the rank of a general. He came out as an interne of the second rank. He was court-martialled as a consequence of his pacifist tendencies. He finally escaped in an aeroplane. What a fine military career! I certainly do admire him for having had so much courage.

Stockholm is a large and beautiful city, in which everything bespeaks opulence and peace. These people are happy, for they were wise enough to remain neutral.

As to the awarding of the Nobel Prizes, it is a simple ceremony. The king is below and the laureates are on a stage (with us it is the other way round; our professors are up on the stage and the students below. This is because we are a democracy.) When your name is called you must go up and get the prize which is handed you by the king. Then you come down a little stairway resembling a ladder. When I was called, I had to be supported, but it all went off without any accident. This wasn't so with the laureate of the chemistry prize, a stout German scholar whose enormous stomach prevented him from seeing his feet. He missed his step, slipped and fell at the king's feet. Lucien, who was in the room, couldn't keep from laughing out loud and almost caused a scandal. Finally the professor was helped up and given his prize.

The prize consists simply of a folder in which the check



is found. In the course of this scene I couldn't help noting how little men are able to vary the nature of the rewards they bestow. If it's still lawful for them to vary their means of punishment, to modify the penalties, they nevertheless seem incapable of varying the forms of their rewards. It's always the same old way everywhere. The distribution of the Nobel Prize is like the distribution of a primary school prize.

—Did you see King Gustavus V?

M. France.—Yes, what a friendly man he is. He invited me to dinner and we had a long talk. He is simplicity itself, as only those who are born to the throne know how to be. He is much more accessible than a president of the Republic, a Poincare or a Millerand, who think it necessary to surround themselves with external pomp, because they know that by themselves they mean nothing. Gustavus is frequently to be seen on the streets of Stockholm, walking by himself. He is familiar with his people and yet they love him.

The king is well acquainted with his city. He knows what a bore court life is. So he dines with his friends and plays his favorite game with them. He told me many interesting things that showed great common sense and a real knowledge of men.

"Most heads of states," the king declared, "are more afraid of words than of things. That's a great error. It is the contrary which is true. One must accept words and leave things alone." That was an allusion by the king to the President of the Council, Branting. The king had taken a Socialist minister, but he had left socialism behind him.

We pointed out to M. France, that the same thing was true in France, where Socialists arrived at power in proportion to the speed with which they abandoned socialism.

M. France.—That's true but they were treated as rene-

gades by their old comrades, and found themselves confronted by fierce stand patters who tried to take their places from them. These party quarrels are less dangerous under a monarchy. It can really be said that socialism doesn't exist in Sweden.

When someone indiscreetly asked M. France what he was going to do with the Nobel Prize, he didn't answer. It was the time of the great Russian famines. Some probably thought that the Master would send considerable subsidies to the starved Russians. If he did, it must have been with such great reserve that nobody ever learned of it. But M. France gave something better than his money to his Russian friends—his talent, his name.

In this way we met a Russian woman from Petrograd and Moscow, young, enthusiastic and homely. She spoke of Lenine with the mystic ecstasy with which a nun would speak of Christ. She said to the Master that Lenine had a high regard for him and particular respect.

M. France.—I am proud that Lenine, who is the greatest man Russia has produced since Peter the great, speaks well of me.

The young Russian woman asked the Master to be good enough to send a despatch in the interest of two American communists who had just been condemned to death. M. France, looking inquiringly at Tico for permission, assented. He wrote an appeal in terms that were grandiose rather than well chosen.

"It is for the party," the young Russian woman said, thanking him.

M. France.—Yes, it is for the party, for the Revolution. It is our last hope.

It is astonishing what gravity and seriousness M. France could assume under such circumstances.

## CHAPTER XIII

### MEMORIES OF THE PAST

THE Academy elections, the candidacy of Ch. Maurras; will M. France vote for the man who in spite of everything has remained his warm and faithful admirer? One Sunday M. France explained to us why he could not.

M. France.—If I gave an interview on this subject to the *Petit Journal*, it wasn't to be unfriendly to Maurras, but precisely because his friends said that I couldn't do otherwise than vote for him and I was obliged to protest. I don't like to have my hand forced or to be bound. Of course I don't deny the great, the immense talent of Maurras, who is one of the few men left to know how to write. But we are divided by too many things.

Someone remarked that M. France had not always felt this way and that he had written some very fine lines on Maurras.

M. France.—Oh, that was long ago and dates from a time when Maurras wasn't royalist and I very nearly was.

The Master went to Paris to take part in the elections. On his return he described them to us.

M. France.—The election of Abel Hermant is impossible. After the fourth tie the friends of Hermant, feeling the atmosphere unfavorable, demanded that the ballot be stopped. M. le Comte d'Haussonville objected to this in a frigid tone, maintaining that there was nothing to do but go on. It was then that I got the impression that Abel Hermant would not win.

We asked his reasons.

M. France.—He is disliked and there are good reasons for not liking him. He may have a great deal of talent, but he has a despicable character, on the other hand; even his partisans dislike him. Richepin said in my presence: "I am voting for him because of his talent, but he has an ignoble character."

Michel Corday, who was present, asked the Master whether or not it was he who was Hermant's patron at the Academy, his Egeria.

Here M. France answered with a pleasantry that I can't repeat but which was pretty strong. He added that Hermant had no chance, that he would be wiser if he stopped now, that he would never succeed.

M. France.—Of course I voted for him, for I couldn't decently give my vote to Madelin, this historian of bourgeois salons. As for the Maurras-Jonnart contest, no, I could not vote for Maurras, really, it was quite impossible, too many things estrange us. Of course, it's also true that we have many things in common. Thank God I didn't vote for Jonnart. So I voted for a third, and what a third! Ah, I'm not so proud of my choice, I can tell you.

These remarks were made in May 1923. The Master's health was not very good. He complained of a swelling on the inside of his right hand.

M. France.—I'm in pain, my hand closes by itself and I have difficulty in opening it again. But I still sleep at night. The electric treatment Ledoux-Lebard gave me didn't do me a bit of good. I've been to a surgeon, he said it was nothing. I was astonished to find him asking me a host of questions: what does your regular physician think of your health? have you diabetes, albumen? Then he looked at the whites of my eyes.

I was then threatened with a terrible operation! Now what do you think of these doctors? First they declare that

the disease you have amounts to nothing, and afterwards they want a mass of information. If it's nothing, why all these questions? If it's necessary to ask them, then it can't be nothing.

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We began to talk once more of the occupation of the Ruhr—it had been a long time since we last discussed it.

M. France.—The Ruhr is a disastrous undertaking. It will yield nothing. Poincaré persists only out of vanity. Peace has not been accomplished, it is farther off than ever.

Nevertheless it must be admitted that Germany is disconcerting. I'm surprised at the way these Germans bear the occupation. They are really disgusting. There's no German unity, it's fictitious and superficial; at the least shock it's upset. The Germans are made either to conquer or submit. When they can't conquer, they yield. There is no really united country but France. It is true the work of unification has been going on there for centuries and was done by good workers. In France an uninterrupted occupation would be impossible, in Germany it is perfectly tolerable. I had thought that if the occupation lasted more than a few weeks, there would be a social revolution on the occupied territory. But nothing happened, and nothing will happen. Franco-German reconciliation must take place and socialism alone can bring it about. All the German Socialist parties are Francophile. If the rapprochement fails, there will be a reactionary movement, the dynasty will reappear and relations will be more strained than ever.

The whole Ruhr situation was urged and forced on Poincaré by the *Action française* and Daudet; it is this paper that is the government. Nevertheless the *Action française* is losing favor with the public because it isn't doing anything.



Something was expected of it, nothing came. At Plateau's funeral one felt that something significant might have happened. But nothing did. It's deluding and people get tired of it. The Republic is growing stronger, luck is changing, little by little the Republic is recovering from the serious disturbance wrought by the war. Daudet is supporting Poincaré but by that very act he is collaborating with the Republic and fortifying it; Daudet is already a Republican.

Once more we spoke of Poincaré. I liked to get the Master to talk about this man whom he himself called the first statesman of the régime.

M. France.—You've heard me say all this before. He's a vain man. He knows a great deal, but his cold-heartedness is terrible. He is a difficult man to soften. One day during the war he gave me an amusing little lesson. I had received an agonizing letter from a soldier at the front condemned to death for abandoning his post to the enemy. This man wrote me from prison to tell me how much he had loved me through my works without knowing me, that they had helped him to live and that before dying he wanted to say goodbye to me. I was much moved by this letter. The soldier didn't ask me to do anything for him and I felt that I should do something for him. I wrote to Poincaré asking him to pardon this man. Several days passed. Finally I received a letter from Poincaré, saying that he regretted being unable to satisfy my petition, but that before receiving it he had gone over the case carefully himself and that he had found it advisable to grant a pardon to this man who had been tempted to yield in a moment of weakness. He added that he was nevertheless happy to ascertain that his decision coincided with my own wishes. So he managed to grant me what I asked without putting me under any obligation

of gratitude to him. He must have said to him: I won't oblige M. France to thank me. There's an occasion in which he showed a great deal of tact.

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The 8th day of January 1923 I received from M. Barthou, former President of the Council and President of the Commission on Reparation, the following letter.

DEAR SIR:

I am asking you to do me a great favor in connection with a short notice on Chenier published by the *Amis des Livres*. I am in need of information on some lines written by Anatole France and which Becq de Fouquières insisted upon attributing to the author of *La jeune captive*. What lines? Where is one to find the clue to this curious controversy? I appealed to our good Master but I should like to save him the trouble of a reply, so I hope you will help me get this information from him.

To satisfy M. Barthou, I went to La Bechellerie. I found M. and Mme. France together in the salon. The Master wore a red silk handkerchief knotted on his forehead into two enormous horns. It made him look very strange. I submitted the problem to him that M. Barthou had confided to my care.

The Master was amused at the dispute and with his incomparable memory was able to answer immediately:

"I remember these lines very well. They are mine and not André Chenier's. They begin this way:

Prosperine incertaine . . .

Sur sa victime encore suspendat les ciseaux.

Moreover, I'll give him still further proof.

The Master disappeared and returned with the volume of André Chenier's work edited by Becq de Fouquières.

M. France.—Here, look at this passage on page 135:

Prosperine incertaine  
Sur sa victime encore suspendat les ciseaux  
Et le fer respectant ses longues tresses blondes  
Ne l'avait pas voueaux infernales ondes  
Iris du haut des cieux, sur ces ailes de feu,  
Descend vers Prosperine. "Oui, qu'a l'inferral Dieu  
Didon soit immolée, emporte enfin ta proie. . ."  
Elle dit; sous le fer soudain le crin mortel  
Tombe; son oeil se ferme au sommeil eternel  
Et son souffle s'envole a travers les nuages.

And a note one reads. "These lines were published by M. France in the *Intermédiaire des chercheurs et des curieux* No. 10, of the 10th of August 1864, from a copy made from André's manuscript itself. In No. 14, the 31st of August, 1864, M. Gabriel de Chenier replied that these lines could not be André's because he never wrote in his books and because these were very bad lines. On the 25th of October 1865, M. P. Lacroix rightly replied that it didn't matter whether these lines had been copied on the margin itself of a Virgil or on a loose sheet, and that one could recognize Chenier's manner and style in every detail."

Think of these critics, there were two of them, Lacroix and Becq de Fouquières—who recognized in these very bad lines the manner and style of André Chenier! Now these lines are mine, I wrote them at college one day out of sheer ennui, to pass the time away. I was twenty years old when I broke into the *Intermédiaire*. Tell Barthou that under the circumstances I certainly was a forger, but that it's the only time in my life that I was.

Moreover, these lines are very bad. I took a great many pains in writing them. I especially call your attention to the expression "crin mortel," I thought it was magnificent; *crin*

seemed to me much lovelier than *cheveux*. I got my idea for these lines from reading a "Malherbe" with notes by André Chenier, published by M. Tenant de la Tour about 1860 and edited by Charpentier.

This is the whole story. In its day it amused me very much. You must admit that to have had the bad verses of a twenty-year old rascal taken for Chenier is really a great joke.

And the conversation, as was natural, continued on André Chenier.

—He is a pure and delightful poet. After Racine, I love him best. His language has the sonorousness of a crystal, his mind is richer in ancient culture than any one else's I know. He entrances me. I used to know hundreds of lines of his by heart. I used to recite them to myself and go into ecstasies over them. I was once very fond of poetry.

—And today?

M. France.—Today, it's not the same thing. Poetry is all right for the young man before whom life is unfolding full of joy and hope. It seems to me that philosophy, when it is comprehensible, is more suitable to my age and the fate hanging over me, death. It is in this spirit that I have just read Cato's *De Senectute* by Cicero. Old age is not without its charms; to find them is the whole problem. The old man, says Cicero, is free from the passions. His judgment is no longer biased and he has a more profound view of life. It is Christianity that taught us the fear of death. It weighs heavily on us, it saddens us; for this reason I'm glad my little grandson hasn't a single religious prepossession, that he is completely unacquainted with superstition.

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Mme. France and Lucien Psichari entered the salon. Mme. France who was in a good humor spoke of M. France's

arrival at La Bechellerie and the visitors they used to have.

Mme. France.—Do you remember when we moved in 1914?

—I remember the dining room full of boxes, the chair in which M. France sat, which was losing its upholstering underneath. There was also a little black desk which seemed right out of a primary school.

Mme. France.—We still have it up in the attic.

M. France.—Do you remember C., who used to act as my secretary at that time? He had such a red skin that I baptized him *Asinus Ruber*. He had a great passion for writing plays and a still greater one for reading them aloud. Today he is, fortunately, at the Leblanc Museum, where he takes care of a lot of filthy details connected with the war collected by a crazy old man. I'm delighted to have him there. A few names came to my lips, Wasser and Mortim, the two Americans; S, the famous wounded soldier, M. and Mme. S., the Englishman Robert D., Mme. C., and many others.

M. France.—To think that it will be ten years since all that happened! Wasser, after having traveled for a long time in Europe, is back in America. He is ruined. Before his departure he came to see me. I found him less handsome than formerly, he had gotten fat. He had wanted to marry Mme. D. whom you met here—she was so pretty, so attractive. He was madly in love with her, but she refused him. Today she regrets it, for she has lost her daughter, a girl of fourteen, and is all alone. It is true that a ruined Wasser wouldn't have appealed to her quite as much.

Do you ever hear from Mortim?

—No, I answered, I knew that after his demobilization he started a bank in Paris. For a while he used to send me enticing prospectus soliciting me to buy securities destined



to run superb courses. But being very wary of such things I never answered him.

Mme. France.—He made me the same propositions, but I didn't pay any attention to them either.

M. France.—You were very wise. Mortim did such risky things that he is in prison, which is very rare, you'll admit, for a banker. As for S. whom we knew as a Bolshevist and communist, the friend of Barbusse and Vaillant-Couturier, he followed in his father's footsteps: he became a miser and now only thinks of taking care of his money and investing it properly. I scarcely ever see him.

The lovely Mme. S., who, with her young and fresh beauty, used to delight us so, has lost her aged husband, the poor S., the most charming and most confused mind I ever came in contact with. He died in Switzerland, alone, on a business trip. The daughter of his first marriage has an unfortunate history: some pearls were entrusted to her, I believe, and not restored. And as for Mme. S., that poor Tracassin, as Moulet used to call her, has married again. She is the Baroness T. L.

—What, a Baroness?

M. France.—Yes, but one mustn't exaggerate. The baron is an impoverished noble who lives in Perigord, in shabby gentility, and as for his land, let's say that he has a few acres, but no more.

Mme. France.—M. France exaggerates a great deal, as usual. Mme. S.'s estate is not magnificent, but it's a little more pretentious than M. France is willing to grant. When we went south by automobile a year or two ago, we stopped at Mme. S.'s who had become Baroness T. L., and we found her as lovely as ever, but a little stouter. She seemed happy.

M. France.—What do you mean; she seemed happy? She is happy. That's the way women are. Her first hus-

band showered jewels on her, surrounded her with care, let her live in costly luxury. The poor man hoped to have his old age overlooked in this way; he begged a smile and got only insults, scenes, fits of anger. Well, today it's quite different. She hasn't anything, she dresses like a peasant, her husband shows her no tenderness, and she adores him and is happy.

I made M. and Mme. France laugh when I described to them the scenes in the S. household during the Gotha raids in the apartment on the boulevard Hausmann, which I shared with them. When the raid was announced Mme. S. began to shake her husband. "George, don't forget my cash box, George, my pocketbook, George, the dog," and George would come down to the mezzanine in a dressing gown, his arms laden with packages, squeezing the dog so hard that it howled, dropping from time to time some bundle that would go rolling down the black stairs step by step, while upstairs one could hear the harmonious voice of Mme. S. yelling, "Imbecile, what a fool, he's gone and dropped my jewels."

M. France.—That must have been a funny sight. I can imagine S. sweating and panting while Tracassin hurled a thousand lovely compliments at him. This great big fellow deserved something better than that; he was kindness and goodness itself. Only he was crazy to have his finger in every pie. He was obsessed with several ideas a day and all were intriguing. I was, of course, the pivot of each. He had put me at the head of a collection called the *Encyclopedie du savoir humain*, in which scholars of the whole world were to collaborate. I refused, he pursued me. This will be, he declared, the greatest work since that of Diderot and d'Alembert. The number of talented draughtsmen he brought me to illustrate my work, of musicians to put them to music was amazing. I was overwhelmed with the whole business. Jaurès had commended him to me because he was one of the first subscribers

to *l'Humanite*. I was never able to get rid of him; but he was charming.

Robert D., that worthy but amusing Englishman, who directed, together with de Marmande, the ephemeral review *Les Nations*, was, as you know, expelled from France by Clemenceau. Back in England and writing for the Manchester Guardian, he kept up a frankly anti-French propaganda. After all, expulsion was preferable to court-martial.

What became of Dr. C. and his wife?

M. France.—Dr. C. is continuing his study of religious history. He hopes to prove in a conclusive way that Christ never existed. As far as I'm concerned I'm utterly convinced. But I don't think he'll ever succeed in getting his ideas accepted. It would be too painful a thing to admit that religions, theologies, rites, have been built up merely on a myth. Nevertheless, that's the truth of the matter, but men will never recognize it. Dr. C. is the most intelligent man I ever knew.

Mme. France.—As for Mme. C. she goes on, works courageously. I believe she's with the editor Devambez now.

M. France.—She was beautiful, very beautiful; she's also very intelligent and very well qualified for being out in the world, but it's curious that whatever she does engage in generally doesn't turn out well.

So we spent many pleasant hours speaking of the past ten years, of the people who had livened the salon of La Bechellerie at the beginning of the war. We weren't so ungrateful as to forget Mme. Courteline and Courteline, who, having been ill with rheumatism, had written to the "patron," as he called the Master, that he was suffering as if some one had beat him all over.

M. France.—Poor Courteline, I'm so fond of him. He wrote the *Conversion d'Alceste*, which is a masterpiece. But he drinks too much coffee. It is wearing him out.

## CHAPTER XIV

### BOOKSELLERS, ANTIQUARIANS AND OTHER PLEASANT PERSONS

IT was in the autumn of 1923 and the first months of 1924 that I had my last conversations with M. France. He no longer received on Sunday afternoons, because Lucien Psichari liked to go automobile riding then, but on Fridays. I had the good fortune to hear the Master relate a few memories of his childhood, unpublished chapters of his last book, *Le Petit Pierre and La Vie en Fleur*.

M. France.—It's very difficult to talk about one's own childhood. There's a natural tendency to look at it with the eyes of the age at which one is talking and to read its spirit into the past. In this way childhood memories lose all their freshness and spontaneity. If, on the other hand, one strains to reproduce the emotions of childhood in words, then there's a danger of falling into mere puerility.

I remarked that he had avoided this double danger.

M. France.—I'm not so sure that I have, but I've done my best. I saw and listened to a great many people in my father's shop. When I think of it, it seems like walking in a morgue and being myself a survivor. There are people who only hang on to life by a thread, since I am now the only one left who remembers them. When I'm not here any more they'll be completely dead. I got to know many priests in my father's shop. My father was glad to have them come and liked to talk to them. He appreciated the caste and the vast culture of their minds. The old French clergy, still somewhat imbued with the Gallic spirit and tinged with Jan-

senism, was really admirable. Among those who came most regularly was the Abbé Le Blastier. He was a tall man, grave and solemn. He spoke of M. Bossuet with a respect that combined a great tenderness with great eloquence. He declared that he alone had known how to write history with that deep concern in the movements of humanity which characterizes real historians. He indignantly compared him with M. Thiers, whom he went so far as to treat as a fake. "M. Thiers simply doesn't exist," he would say. Nevertheless he bought his books. To do so he would deprive himself of many things, principally tobacco, for he took snuff, blowing into a big Madras handkerchief. M. l'Abbé Le Blastier was appointed curé of a little parish at Brie. He had Mgr. Darboy, who had been his companion at the seminary, to thank for this position. One day he invited my mother and father and myself to come to see him. So one Sunday we all went. He was at church, in the act of going over the catechism to a single child accompanied by his mother. His mother kept giving him thumps on the head to make him keep quiet. The child howled, but nothing could upset M. l'Abbé Le Blastier's habitual poise. He went on as if nothing were the matter.

M. l'Abbé Le Blastier was much devoted to two old ladies at Paris, Mlles. Verpy. They claimed to belong to an excellent family. Both were hunchbacked and very ugly. The one who was less hunchbacked was the uglier, the other, who was not quite so ugly, was more hunchbacked. They carried on intermissible lawsuits with various members of their family who, they said, had cheated them. Their cause seemed so just to l'Abbé Le Blastier that he had gotten all worked up over it, cursing the unfairness of judges and the mercenary principles of lawyers. M. l'Abbé Le Blastier gave modest contributions toward the dubious triumph of this just cause.

In the course of our visit, these two ladies were discussed. The Abbé declared that he no longer saw them. "Would



you believe it," he said, "they actually came here to see me. They slept at the presbytery. The next day there were filthy words and coarse drawings all over the walls from the station right up to the presbytery. Then I understood the situation and since then I don't see them anywhere. The wickedness of men is unfathomable."

M. l'Abbé Lantaigne had many similar features of character. He was tall, thin, solemn, took snuff, was, like the Abbé Le Blastier, an eminent theologian, and like him didn't attain the episcopate although he was in every respect worthy of it.

Apropos of the Abbé Lantaigne, M. France spoke of M. l'Abbé Duchesne, who had just died.

M. France.—What an evil tongue he had and what wit! There are innumerable stories current about him. Here is one. One day at Rome, we were visiting together the chapel erected on the spot where, according to tradition, St. Peter was beheaded. His head, it seems, rebounded three times and on the spots where it touched the ground it is said that three springs of water gushed forth. In the chapel, called that of the Three Fountains, the Abbé pointed to an inscription. Don't throw rubbish here. "A warning very poorly observed," he said, pointing to a Brief of Pius IX hung up on the wall at one side.

L'Abbé Duchesne wanted to reconcile faith and history. That's an impossible task and a vain one besides. To the orthodox he appeared suspicious, to real scholars, he appeared timid. He pleased no one. Pope Pius IX stood in horror of him, and looked on him as if he were the devil. And yet he was a very intelligent man.

Memories of his father's shop brought him to speak of his love for books, and the fondness he had always had for book-shops.

M. France.—Among my ordinary books I have all the edi-

tions of Racine. He is my favorite poet. I still read him; I have him almost by heart. At night, when I can't sleep, I recite my favorite passages to myself.

I have always spent a lot of time visiting antiquarians and booksellers. I once knew a very amusing and original bookseller. His name was Symes. He was an Englishman living in France, Rue des Beaux Arts. He was scrupulously honest. He fell in love with a woman, a very pretty actress in the full bloom of her beauty. He proposed to her, but she refused him. Symes said to her: "Mademoiselle, whenever you change your mind I shall still be willing to marry you." Twenty years passed. The actress was no longer young and beautiful, having led a very dissipated and immoderate life. She had grown poor and so remembered the bookseller's promise and summoned him.

Very much embarrassed, for he considered himself as bound, Symes came to consult me on this delicate problem of conscience. He was astonished and almost indignant to see me laugh. It took all my eloquence to persuade him that he was in no way obligated. Symes, finally convinced, did not marry her. . . . He was very absent-minded. He put on his clothes one on top of the other, in the order in which he picked them up, which resulted in his being decently dressed about one day out of two.

I have rummaged through all the bookshops on the left bank, around the Institute. I love this quarter, and I am very well known there. The booksellers watch for my coming to suggest bargains to me, and also the antiquarians.

—Did you have much success?

M. France.—No, I began too late.

I laughed.

M. France.—Don't laugh. It's the truth. I became rich too late.

The conversation flagged, and M. France, who had just

gotten settled again at La Bechellerie, offered to show me over the house. The new rooms he had added on the left were charming, furnished with old secretaries, chests and chairs dug up in the shops of Tours and Paris. His usual assistant in this was his friend R., toward whom he entertained a warm affection, that R. entirely deserved.

Mme. France's room was delightful. The whole effect, the bed, the furniture, the engravings, the knick-knacks, were done in the best of taste. Mme. France's room adjoined M. France's and the contrast was striking.

M. France.—I'll show you my room. I love it because it is austere.

And indeed M. France's apartment was austerity itself. A bed, a table, a chair. On the mantel a marvelous antique, a marble torso of a woman.

Mme. and M. France contemplated their rooms with satisfaction and exchanged compliments over them.

M. France.—It's Tico who chose everything, arranged everything, did everything. Tico is a love.

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When M. France returned to the large salon there were a number of visitors, among others Mme. Alphonse Daudet and her son, Lucien. M. France showed how glad he was to see her. They began to go over their memories of the past.

Mme. A. Daudet asked M. France about the poet, Xavier de Ricard, whom both of them had known.

"He died in poverty," said Mme. Daudet, "He was such an appealing, good natured sort of person."

Then they spoke of Marcel Proust.

M. France.—I was acquainted with him and wrote a preface, I believe, for one of his early books. He is the son of a physician who is a hygienist at the Ministry of the In-

terior. Unfortunately, it seems he has become neurasthenic in the worst way. He no longer leaves his bed. His shutters are closed all day and the electric light always on. I can't understand his work. He was amiable and witty and had keen powers of observation. But I suddenly stopped visiting him and it's now twenty years since I've seen him.

Mme. Daudet declared that she liked him.

M. France.—I tried to understand him, but I didn't succeed. But that's not his fault. It's mine. We understand only our contemporaries, those of our own generation, perhaps, too, those of the generation that immediately follows ours. After that it stops and we are incomprehensible, the one to the other.

In the animated conversation that followed, M. France discoursed on the unsuspected riches of the French language, the inadequacy of dictionaries, and yet the discoveries nevertheless to be made in them.

M. France.—Take a dictionary and make the experiment. You have only to run through it to perceive the considerable number of words of which we are completely unaware. We don't know more than four or five in a column. Our ordinary vocabulary is very limited. Remember that each art, each technique, has its vocabulary, its peculiar terms, and that we are generally unacquainted with it. I once asked a carpenter, whom I was watching, the names of the different tools he used. I was surprised at the number of words that were entirely unfamiliar to me. Maritime technique has a language of its own of which we know nearly nothing. If sailors began to speak of their trade before us, they would seem to be speaking a foreign language.

—Is there a good dictionary?

M. France.—No, I don't think so. The Academy's really doesn't exist, since as soon as one part is done, it's already out of date. Darmesteter complains that the Littré lacks



Anatole France's Library at La Béchellerie





logical order. There are, moreover, words very difficult to explain. For example, take one of the most difficult words in the French language, *timbre*, difficult because of the variety of its meanings. To make a good dictionary, one would have to dedicate one's whole life to it and know everything. We are really not ready for one yet.

Once more M. France spoke to us of Bossuet.

M. France.—He knew his language as we don't know it any more. He had at his disposal an ample and rich vocabulary and used it admirably. The more cultured one is, the more words one has at his disposal. Bossuet's culture was enormous. Everything he did was done beautifully. Like all the great spirits of the XVIIIth century, Bossuet didn't like or profess a popular religion, based on miracles and the element of the marvelous. He tried, on the contrary, to diminish this side of it as much as possible. The element of the marvelous was reduced to what it is in the Old and New Testaments. Bossuet, as a rationalist, is a forerunner of Diderot and d'Alembert.

M. France was interrupted in his talk by the arrival of a tall and fashionably dressed gentleman whom M. France received warmly and called Gaston. It was M. Gaston Calmann-Levy.

M. Gaston Calmann-Levy walked up to M. France and slapped him familiarly on the shoulder.

"Well, my good France, how are you, as fine as ever?"

Several times after that M. Calmann-Levy lightly slapped M. France's shoulder and called him "my good France" and each time M. France smiled. . . .

Tea was served. This permitted me to admire the robust and sturdy appetite of the Daudet family. Lucien Daudet kept putting one cake after the other without your having the time to see him. They would disappear in two mouthfuls. Lucien Psichari, who sat opposite me, seemed very much

amused by it. A little later he told me that he had seen Lucien Daudet eat fourteen cakes one right after the other, that it was a record he could certainly not beat, though he was fond of them himself.

M. France discussed with Lucien Daudet the investigations into the origins of the war undertaken in the Chamber.

M. France.—Vaillant-Couturier acted like an eighteen year old. What presumption! Poincaré certainly put him where he belonged. He made a single mouthful of him.

—All the peoples are equally guilty, said a voice that I think belonged to Lucien Daudet.

M. France.—I have reflected a good deal on the causes of the war and tried to determine them. I should have liked to write on this subject, though not to try to discover the immediate reasons and get entangled in the childish quarrels of one people with another. He began it, no he—I tell you it's he—and so on. It's puerile. But rather to look for the great general remote causes of the conflict. The last word hasn't been spoken on this subject yet. Those who come after us will witness many curious revelations. I'm sorry I am so old.

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There being no more cakes left, Lucien went home.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE LAST DAYS OF ANATOLE FRANCE

**H**ERE are a few anecdotes and a few sayings of the Master's set down at random.

"A people must be very rich before it can afford the luxury of a democratic government."

"Van Donghen's portrait will never enter La Bechellerie. I don't want to have him to look at. It makes me feel like soft camembert."

"Jules Lemaître was a delightful man. Unfortunately he suffered from a very ancient disease that destroyed his brain."

M. France to M. Courteline.—You know, my dear friend, that I do admire your work.

Courteline, in his teasing voice: "My dear Master, I know you say so, but I don't know what you really think."

One day, wanting to pay for a modest purchase.

"Now that I'm in my second childhood, I never have a cent in my pocket. I must always ask my wife."

He went out to the auto in which Mme. France was waiting for him and asked her for twenty francs.

"I once wrote a pamphlet on Lamartine's *Elvire*. I was young when I wrote it. Since then I have learned that while Lamartine was writing romance on the banks of Lake Bourget, he kept five or six farm girls with whom he spent his nights. There's another comedian for you."

"You should display Michel Corday's work, *Les Hauts Fourneaux*. It is one of the few books that tell a little truth about the war. I'm sending an article on it to the

Humanité. Corday has no talent, but he's such a fine person."

"I have had the salon of La Bechellerie and Mme. France's little salon fitted up. The interior decorator Dreyfus asked me 90,000 francs for the work. You don't get much for your money, but even at that I'm saving money."

"My works have been put on the index and my wife is afraid this may have some effect on their sale."

Courteline and the Master are passing the time at thinking up the names of the forty Immortals. They have thought of four.

Suddenly Courteline puts his hand to his forehead and says:

"Why, my dear Master, there's yourself." That made five. They stopped there.

"Rappoport is charming, but when he comes to Saint-Cyr he preaches the Social Revolution along the way to the people he meets. It's very silly, he'll give them a bad opinion of me in my commune and get me into trouble."

"I'm not going to the Côte d'Azur any more. I have a horror of hotels and rooms close to one another. At night you can hear other people making love. I used to find that agreeable in former days. But now it gives me futile regrets."

"Barthou delivered a fine address on Napoleon. But he's capable of saying just the opposite as well. He is an opportunist."

"Jeanne d'Arc is a simpleton surrounded by learned men. The power of the Holy Spirit must be very great to be able to inspire such a stupid girl. But that's the way it is. The Holy Spirit doesn't inspire intelligent people. The deliverance of Orleans is a legend. There wasn't a single Englishman or a regular army before her. It was my desire to do what Renan tried to do for Jesus. We were both unsuccessful."



ful. Legend is stronger than history. Besides, men won't stand for the truth except when it coincides with their desires."

"Rousseau was nothing but a vicious lackey. If he hadn't written so well he would have had no influence whatever."

"Voltaire didn't have Rousseau's influence because he didn't have a heart. It's not by reason that men are aroused, but by their passions. *Les Confessions* has affected generation after generation because in them they feel a living man and recognize themselves in him."

"War will last as long as humanity. To think it can be suppressed is Utopian."

"The Republic is dying out, nobody believes in it any more except those who live by it. It's quite true, however, that such persons are numerous. So it will go on for a long time."

"Where did M. Bergeeret live? In an imaginary city which is a composite of Caen, Bourges and Poitiers."

"Saint Paul must have had a very disagreeable character, his epistles clearly show that."

"The return of Princes and of the monarchy? Why not? There's nothing impossible in that. In history there's no such thing as an era being definitely over."

"It's possible to pardon the Revolution for the death of that imbecile Louis XVI; but Marie-Antoinette's was excusable."

"The Bolsheviks brought on the Revolution in order to have peace. Now they are building up a formidable army to make war. They will soon be asking for Constantinople again."

"The French Revolution declared peace to the world. From that day on war has never stopped."

"In 1874, I believe, I was in Rome and was invited to dine at M. de Rossi's with Mommsen. At table I was put beside Mlle. Mommsen. During the whole meal she didn't stop

talking once of the glory of her illustrious father except to discuss the inexplicable resistance of the people of Alsace-Lorraine, who, called upon to assimilate a high form of civilization, didn't seem to appreciate at all their good fortune. The Germans are always so tactful."

"The Catholic Church has united and blended the three greatest things humanity has ever known: Jewish prophetism, Platonic and Alexandrian philosophy, and lastly, Roman organization. All of these form a whole which will last for a long, long time."

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My last conversation with M. France took place at the end of December 1923. That was the last time I saw him at home.

He was in his salon sitting by a great wood fire. Mme. France was opposite him.

I inquired after his health. He answered me with a smile that at his age that was no question to ask. It was already so beautiful merely to exist, that one could not ask for more. Then he thanked me for having given Lucien Psichari, whom I met at Tridon's, a few numbers of the *Action française* having to do with Philippe Daudet's death.

M. France.—I'm excited and disturbed by this story. What do you think of it? Was it a case of suicide or assassination? If it was really an assassination, it's an awful thing to kill a child of fourteen because of his father's opinions. What is this den of anarchists into which he fell? It's very extraordinary that he should have gone there himself; he must have been seduced. It's true that this child was an invalid. *Heredo*, his father would say. He seems to have been, in spite of his faults, a charming and delightful young man. Mme. Alphonse Daudet, who loved him tenderly, often spoke to me of his exquisite nature, much too

precocious, and made still more sensitive by the cruel disease that ravaged him. But how can you explain the fact that parents should be so imprudent as to allow their sick son to go on living in the atmosphere in which they lived? Think what Leon Daudet's private life must be like with him constantly in danger of possible assassination, keeping his family in constant anxiety. Add to that the intense, troubled life of a partisan. A child already ill would go mad in this atmosphere.

But that doesn't explain the mysterious death. If the police really played the role Daudet attributes to them, our Republic is worthy of Venice. The police department is a haunt of disreputable characters that controls all our politics. It's not the government that commands the police, it's just the opposite. We shall never know anything. They protested against the *lettres de cachet*. What were they beside the legal mysteries of our time? The Daudet affair will go the way of all the others and, as in our régime nobody remembers, that will be the end of it.

We were alone until after evening. M. France was in a mood to talk. After what he had just said of our régime, I questioned him once more on the Revolution.

Was the Revolution a fortunate and beneficial event? Should we be glad or sorry for it?

M. France.—Don't be mistaken about it, we should deplore it. It upset everything and we've gained nothing by it. We have it to thank for the armed nations, the barracks, the innumerable wars. Men have lost essential, tangible, profitable liberties for a completely theoretical liberty, that of giving their opinion on problems about which they know nothing. Historians have grossly enlarged upon and magnified an event which is useless and harmful in itself.

—But in your book, *Les Dieux ont soif*, you've assisted in correcting history, I told him, for it's quite the most reac-

tionary and most severe treatment of the Revolution that has been written since Joseph de Maistre.

M. France didn't flinch before this statement.

M. France.—I spoke my mind in *Les Dieux ont soif*. I'm not one to write a work of glorification or a pamphlet from preconceived prejudices. I said what I believed to be true, what was the simple result of meditations and studies. Do you wish to know what I really think? The Revolutionaries, our great ancestors, when they are not simply puerile, are despicable. Their ideas? what nonsense. Their ambition? how shameful. Their society? what a prison. Their grandiloquence? what lies. Their promises? what trickery. The Gironde started war to make the throne fall. I despise the Girondins, cold, egoistically solemn bourgeois. They persecuted the throne with the characteristic narrow bitterness of petty bourgeois against the Court and the aristocracy. They took revenge for the scorn that had been heaped upon them. When the throne they had weakened was on the point of falling, their courage failed them and they tried an about face, thus adding to their disgraceful conduct an act of cowardice and hypocrisy.

The Montagnards. They were people of low character. Danton is venal, Robespierre is a monster, the others were terror-stricken creatures brutalized by fear. Marat alone seems to me to be an exception, I find him an appealing and honest personality. He loved men. He preferred that the Revolution should have days, acts of passing violence rather than plunge into the systematic legal cruelty of Robespierre. It isn't always those who cry for the most heads who cut the most off. I can't forgive the Revolutionary Tribunal. It was frightful, inexcusable. If I invented and depicted Gamelin, a member of the Tribunal, it was because I felt that I was here at the very heart of the Revolution. On this side the Revolution is hateful, and shows itself in its



true light of false grandeur, of false heroism, of lying, cowardice, fear and cruelty. I repeat it, because I think it's infinitely true: the Revolution is the work of scoundrels.

—If your friends heard you they wouldn't understand.

M. France.—That's true, but they didn't understand *Les Dieux ont soif*. Haven't they reproached me sufficiently for having laid an irreverent hand on the sacred ark? But that doesn't worry me. I'd rather appear an iconclast than a dupe.

And then, the French Revolution is fundamentally a bourgeois, a capitalistic piece of work. It has nothing social, nothing human in it. Behind its pompous words, there are only special interests, behind its attitudes, only ambitions, behind its generous declarations, only wars and conquests. For a Socialist it offers nothing interesting or beneficial. It consolidated, strengthened, and spread private property and in this way multiplied all the evils which proceed from it. It ushered in the era of capitalism and industrialism. Its deceiving individualism left the individual face to face with a State which has become a monster. This immoderately aggrandized state has become tyrannical, imperious, overbearing. It has imposed its demands under the fine name of patriotism. For a citizen life was more difficult under Napoleon than under Louis XV. The Revolution carried with it all the evils from which we are now suffering, of which we shall perhaps die. Perhaps its evil spirit has still other surprises in store for us. We haven't had a single bit of good from it. Equality before the law is only a farce, since, not taking natural and social conditions into account, it can result only in injustices. It raised the national will to absolute authority, but couldn't secure it against the caprices of individuals—that's impossible to do. Thus it inaugurated the reign of shrewd and clever men who try to interpret and represent the collective will which they only got possession



of by deception. It opened the door wide for money brokers. Its democracy is nothing but the reign of plutocrats. You must admit it's not very heartening. You can always touch a king's heart, but who can touch the heart of a rich man? Perhaps after my death they'll call me the conservative Anatole France.

—Do you then confess, Master, that all the efforts to organize new forms of society are doomed to failure, that the art of governing men the least wickedly as possible was better realized in the past? Must we go back, return to older forms?

M. France.—Bah, you know the past can't be revived. Institutions are created, patterned, take form, then pass away. They must be well protected, for, if they are destroyed they can never be brought back. Institutions are like pairs of slippers, they are best when they're old, you're always sorry to give them up. When you buy a new pair, they hurt your feet.

—And the future?

M. France.—The future? but my dear friend, there is no future, there's nothing. It will always be the same way: men will build, then they will destroy, and so on. They can't get outside of themselves or free themselves from their passions, nothing ever changes. There will be calm periods, others more stormy, but men will always kill one another and afterwards go on with the things just as before. If you reduce humanity to the few essential operations that alone count, do you think there has been any great change since the beginning of Hebraic civilization when the first navigators skirted coasts in search of peaceful places and pleasant sites? Men play with their passions, the greatest events do not change them. Christianity touched them only superficially. Read the Fathers of the IVth and Vth centuries,

they vituperated against men and their outcries prove that the Redemption was useless, that it was futile to sacrifice the son of God for such a race.

—Then there's nothing?

M. France.—Theoretically, yes, nothing. Let us resign ourselves to the fact, we shall never know anything, understand anything, change anything. But practically, there remains the varied play of appearances, the graceful movement of the body, the agreeable illusions of the mind. That is enough with which to fill our ephemeral existences, to the day when we close our eyes to the light. After that I am sure there can be nothing.

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Before the fading fire, M. France continued the conversation on a more personal subject.

—Old age is difficult and my existence is disagreeable. Mme. France, whom I believed cured, is suffering with a very painful disease. All this comes from the operations she underwent. She is a fine woman, a very fine woman. I may die at any moment and I'm very much worried about her and Lucien. I should like to make testamentary dispositions in favor of Lucien, for I love him dearly, as you know. If I leave everything to my wife, she is evidently not going to despoil Lucien, but that will make two hereditary transmissions, two titles to the estate. The whole process is so complicated in our days that Lucien will end up with nothing. You'll grant that it's unfortunate not to be able to leave your property to your own grandson. What can be done to safeguard his fortune?

I really prefer to leave everything to Lucien. But, then, I'm worried about my wife. I spoke to her about it one day when she was in a good humor and she said spontaneously:

"Well, give everything to Lucien, I haven't any right to anything. Lucien will give me what he wants to live on. I have modest tastes, I'm not used to luxury."

You see, she's generous, good, affectionate in her calm moments. She is obviously not very intelligent, but between you and me, what good is intelligence, anyway?

M. France accompanied me to the door of the salon. He threw a large cloak over himself and walked across the bare garden with me. He showed me the fountain he had had installed in front of La Bechellerie.

M. France.—It's pretty, isn't it? R. is responsible for that. It's charming. He has good taste. I like the basins into which the water falls. They beautify the garden and this monotonous sound has something delightful about it.

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Such were our last words together. I only saw the Master after that for a few moments now and then at R.'s or Tridon's. He was worn out and had difficulty in finding words: talking became more and more of a strain. I left for my vacations and illness prevented me from ever seeing him again.

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M. France was very ill all summer. Vigilant friends came to La Bechellerie and watched for the end. Others will perhaps tell many curious and shocking stories about the way this death was waited for. I heard many but I shan't relate any here. They are painful and perhaps not true. Mme. L. K. brought an affectionate dignity to the last days at La Bechellerie and the doctors were worthy of the Master's confidence in them. Dr. M. was a friend of his. I often saw him with his wife and three nice little girls in M. France's salon. He was very devoted to the Master.

I saw the Master again on his deathbed. He was fright-

fully changed. Emaciated, his beard uncut, he seemed to have suffered much. His mouth was a little twisted with pain, his half-opened right eye made a very gruesome effect. His hands alone, long and delicate on the white bed, were the same.

His brain was removed. A physician took it upon himself in an interview to compare it with that of a criminal executed at Tours in September. It was a comparison in very bad taste. One can only hope that the journalist made an inaccurate report of the thought that was confided to him. M. France didn't deserve such shocking associations.

Quite often in my presence he expressed his desire to be buried in the calm little cemetery of St. Cyr-sur-Loire. It would have been an honor for Touraine to have kept the body of this illustrious writer. It is probable that testamentary dispositions didn't permit the satisfaction of this desire. But it is quite certain that the Master would not have wanted his name after his death to be used to show the power and triumph of a political party. To exalt on his grave the mysticism of a special kind of politics was neither necessary nor fitting. If certain ideas of his coincided with the ideas of those who glorified him, he was a sufficiently contradictory personality to make one uncertain of his real political opinions. This consideration should have saved him from the gloomy official pomp as well as from the monotonous speeches and the procession of red flags.

M. France really belonged only to letters, he belonged to them entirely.

It seems to me that if M. France had been buried in the peaceful cemetery of Saint-sur-Loire along the Touraine roads covered with yellowed leaves, escorted by the respectful and loyal sympathy of all who admired him, the spectacle would have been more becoming to one who was so great and yet so simple.

## CONCLUSION

**A**S a matter of fact this book needs no conclusion and it seems superfluous to give it one. A collection of informal conversations, it has not the character of a critical study and any judgment on it would be useless. What tempts me to write these few lines is the desire to participate briefly in the discussion begun by M. Charles Maurras on the real political opinions of Anatole France.

The Master called himself a Socialist, then a communist and Bolshevik. If he stopped there it was because the gamut of our political harmonies included no higher note during his lifetime.

Otherwise he would have played it, you may be sure. His life, his mind, his spirit, gave these opinions the appearance of an attitude adopted because of certain circumstances and then held on to simply because he didn't want to change it. M. France spoke and wrote in order to show clearly that he had not changed, that he didn't want to, that he would die without having changed. The more he repeated his opinions, the more he seemed to be under obligations to them. And they did not correspond to his profound nature. This communist was a great aristocrat and a delightful artist. He loved pictures, engravings, furniture, books, pretty women, all the joys of art and life. He enjoyed them as completely as a man of good health and long life can. There do not seem to have been pressing reasons for M. France to have cried anathema and vowed hate upon a social form from which he does not appear to have suffered greatly.

It may be that he came by his opinions by getting outside



of himself, making an abstraction of himself, considering social injustice from the point of view of others, participating in their sufferings and in their troubles. It's possible, although M. France, like Voltaire, whom he rather resembles, seems to have been protected by a rather lively self-love against excessive enthusiasms of compassion and sympathy.

Consider these things besides. M. France understood the France of the ancient régime with a rare penetration of spirit. He saw with profound insight the merits of one, the faults and uncertainties of the other. I believe that he never had any illusions on the merit and value of our republic.

"I am not a republican, you mustn't take me for an idiot," he repeated this humorously time and time again.

He appreciated the solid value of a well organized society hierarchised, carefully governed, in which ferments of disorder were restrained and in which nevertheless there was sufficient liberty to allow expression of thought without any personal danger. The monarchy seemed to him to possess serious advantages. He saw in it the best political form realized by time in our country. If the monarchy had been established about 1873-1875, M. France, it seems to me, would have been glad to accept it.

Only when the monarchy became impossible and he saw those who presented themselves to govern, was he seized with immense disgust. First, the great bourgeois seemed to him bad imitators of the nobility; then, the middle bourgeoisie who came into power seemed despicable. Rather than identify himself with these and with their régime, he preferred to look toward the people, hope for their triumph, go to the extremes of democracy, that is, Socialism. But it seemed to me he advocated this only for want of something better.

The man who wrote: "Monsieur Choulette, why do you condemn us to the brutal dreariness of equality? Why?

Daphne's flute would not play so well if it were made of seven even reeds. You wish to destroy the beautiful harmony of the Master and his servants, of the aristocracy and the workers. Oh, to destroy the ingenious groups which men of different conditions form in Society, the humble with the great, is to be the enemy of the poor as well as of the rich, is to be the enemy of the human race." The man who wrote that didn't have any illusions on the profound vice and irremediable weakness of democratic societies.

Since nothing can be improved, it's better that everything should collapse. To his cynicism was joined the whim of the sceptic, the joy of destruction; and M. France knew very well that with democratic ideas societies dissolve rapidly. His opinions were neither natural nor facile, but artificial and strained.

His socialism is entirely verbal. At bottom he doesn't like it and understands it poorly. Nothing is farther from him than the humanitarianism of a Tolstoi or the dry and mathematical mind of a Karl Marx. His socialism is not an emotional streak or an organizing thought, it is only the manifestation of his irony.

But what governs and best explains his opinions is a profound, definite horror of the Church. That is the one permanent idea in an unstable state of mind. He is anticlerical, still more antireligious. He detests the Church, priests, monks, faith. He knows the Church.

He spoke of it in perfect comprehension and great serenity when he wanted to, but his hostility was final, his antipathy absolute and irrevocable. He considered Christianity a great misfortune, a revolt of slaves who had a horror of beauty and the intellect.

If M. France had desires, and he had them, to return to traditional forms in France, the thought that the Church

might have a place and influence in them would have immediately frightened him away.

Scepticism, cynicism, antireligious hatred drove M. France to a political extremism which he consistently supported. Did he really want everything to be destroyed, or did he consider that the revolutionary instinct was, in a country like ours, only a comedy one could play without danger to himself and others? We have no way of knowing.

M. France made a great deal of fun of the moderates, of the conservatives, of the nationalists, of the royalists, but he also poked fun generously at the left, the radicals and socialists. Some of these tried in vain to get him to ally himself with them; but he belongs to no one, to the left less than to any others.

In his conversations as in his work, there is something to interest everyone. His spirit was at once too vast and too diverse to be confined within party limits. He was amused by everyone, and perhaps particularly, by himself.

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